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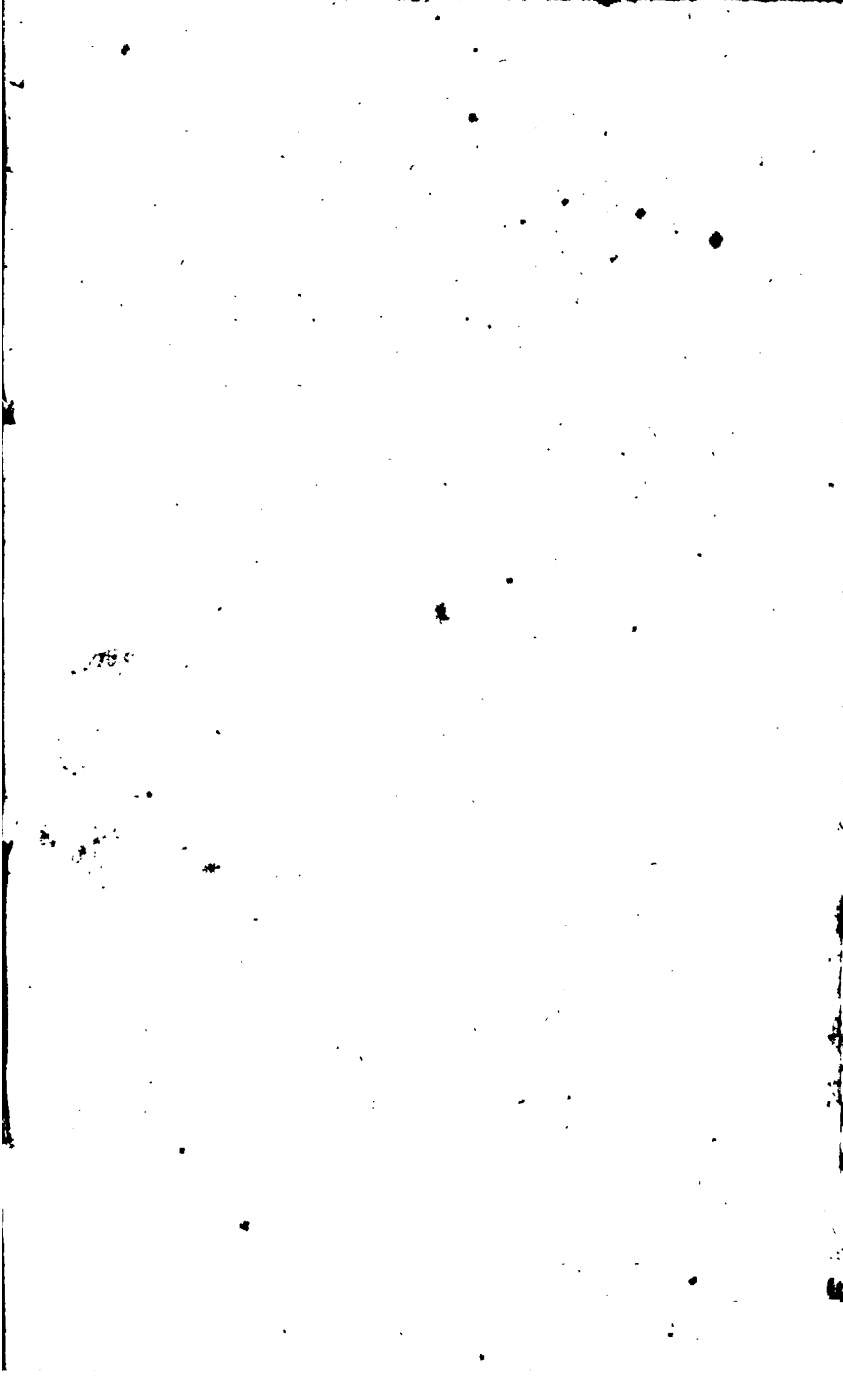
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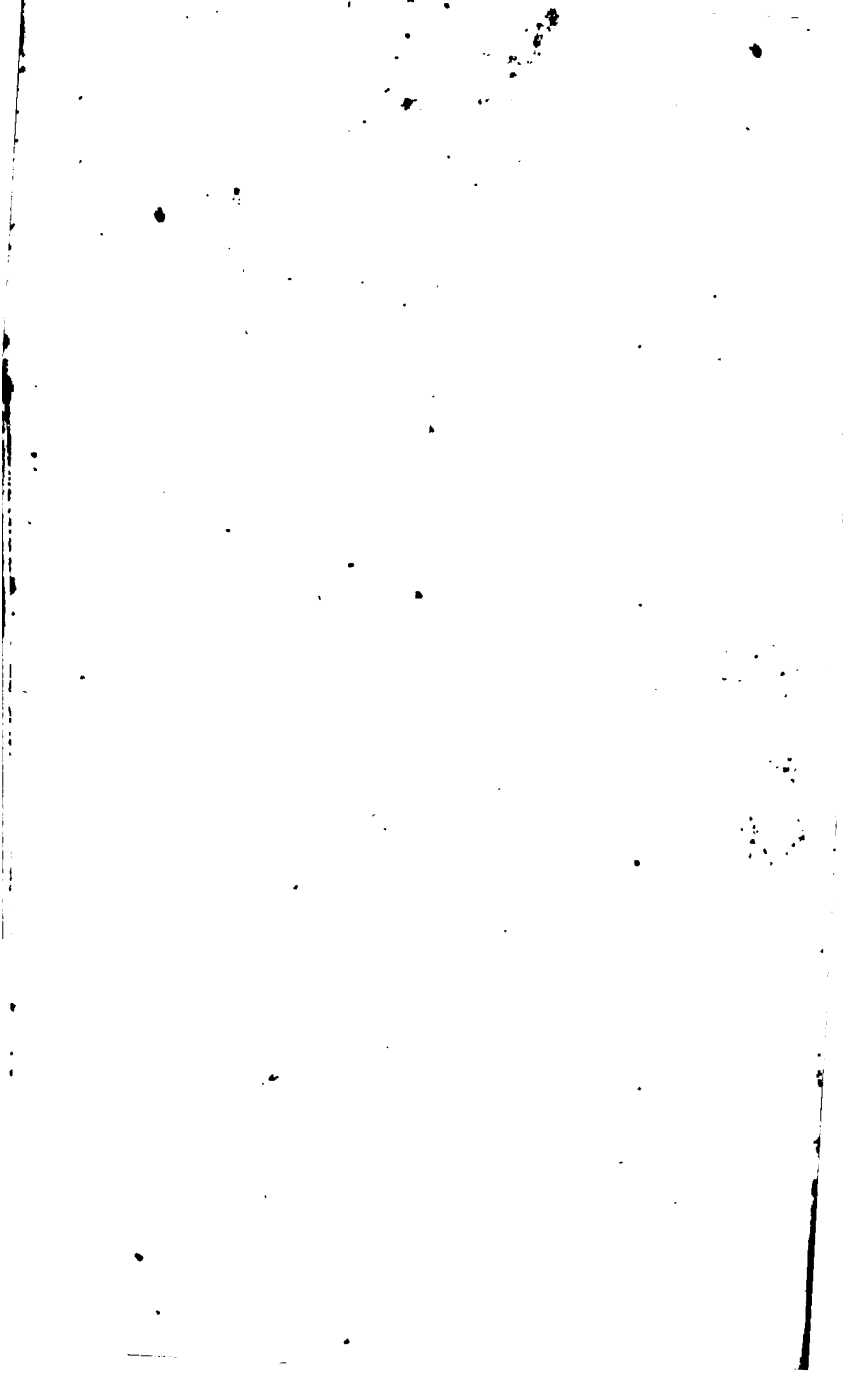
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SPECULATION.

A NOVEL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"TRAITS AND TRADITIONS OF PORTUGAL."

Julia Pardoe.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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SPECULATION.

CHAPTER I.

How widely different in their demonstration and effect are a man's affection and a woman's love! with the one, passion is but a bright scene in the drama of existence; with the other it is the plot, the interest, the drama itself. "Love," says a lively French author, "is but an episode in the history of a man's life"—pity is it that it should be so; for it is inscribed on every page in the heart-record of a woman; it is the spirit which pervades every line. When a female loves, her affection is absorbing, devoted, and exclusive: she "lives, and moves, and has her being" but in one presence: gayety loses its charm, fashion's spell ceases to be talismanic, she has no aim, no hope, no interest, save one—less than this suffices not to her generous, her self-sacrificing spirit.

Different, far different are the effects of the same passion on a man: the very consciousness of being beloved makes him insensibly whimsical, arbitrary, and vain; he is happy beside his mistress, but he is also happy elsewhere: he can find pleasure in a ball-room or a hunting-field; and not unfrequently prefers incurring the risk of spraining his ankle in the one, or breaking his neck at the other, to spending those hours in gentleness and love beside the chosen one of his heart. It is true he tells her with a bland smile and a fond tone, that he owes it to the world to mingle sometimes in its amusements; but would

he admit the plea were the case reversed? Surely not. He would then discover that this clinging to the world's ways betokened coldness, indifference, and neglect. He becomes whimsical and fastidious in his ideas of dress, of manner, and of sentiment; and he does so to try how far his whims will regulate the bearing of his mistress: he sees his opinions and tastes rigidly complied with, for all things are as air in the balance with a woman when she loves, and he necessarily becomes vain of his own power. With him, love is a proud feeling; he is looked up to for applause, clung to for support—with her, it is exactly the reverse: she is loved the more for her helplessness, her timidity, and her weakness; in his love there is encouragement; in hers, confidence and admiration; and thus their feelings towards each other are as distinct as though each were inspired by a different passion.

A man may love, and be deceived; and depart, and forget, and love again:—but woman's heart never enshrines two idols: like the gumcistus, it knows but one sunrise of beauty. No woman ever becomes a systematic coquette until the red-hot iron of falsehood, or the icy bolt of neglect, has first passed over her own heart, and seared all its finer sympathies; it is folly to talk of a female who is a coquette by nature: do we ever meet with a mathematician by nature, or a born linguist? The heart, ere it hath studied its part in the lessons of the world, hath but one form—speaks but one language. Man is a coquette by habit, by education, and above all, by fashion—coquetry in him is called by a gentler and a fonder name: *usage du monde*—gallantry—or at best, he is smiled upon with indulgent admiration as “a sad flirt,” or “an incorrigible dangler.” And yet, what is the sad flirt, or the incorrigible dangler, but a male coquette? a trader in

false vows, and lip-deep professions—a trifle with hope, peace, and affection? Does he not know well, too well, that manner more than matter wins the heart of woman? Has he to learn that his low tones and soft glances awaken feelings in her breast with a more indifferent accent and a colder look would have failed to create? No—he is aware of all this: and this man of gallantry, this courtly mannerist, is a speculative mental-gladiator—a sentimental heart-felon, from whom there is no escape, and to whose venom there is no antidote. But once let a woman establish the same cold, calculating, spirit-war, she is directly denounced as a coquette; and every man who approaches her is as safe as though he were cased in a coat of mail.

It is an unequal venture at the best; for man's love is all sunshine, but many a cloud passes over the horizon of a woman's heart—*his* dream of passion is bowery and beautiful, but many a serpent is hidden beneath the roses of *her* ideal Eden.

“Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,
’Tis woman's whole existence.”

To him it is the plaything of joy and youth; but hers is a deeper, a more enduring love; it is the solace of days of sorrow, of age, and of hopelessness; like the parasite which clings around the tottering column, it lends a beauty even to ruin, and delays the utter devastation which it helps so gracefully to hide. Sever the ivy at the root, and its branches will still cling, and germ, and flourish; meet type, even in this, of the love of woman—rob her of home, of country, of all which once made the charm of her existence, and while one bond yet links her to the object of her young affection, she will live on faithfully and fondly to the last.

Seldom had Lady Clara been in so soliloquizing

a mood ; but a name had been inadvertently mentioned before her, which had awakened feelings and recollections that she would fain have obliterated from her memory for ever. Scenes were recalled by the "one loved name" of young, pure, and beautiful enjoyment : again she saw herself gay, happy, and hopeful ; again she looked into eyes that loved her, and listened to tones which to her had discoursed music. The time had been, though it was now gone for ever, when Lady Clara suffered her heart to speak, unstified by the sordidness of interest, unpolluted by the baseness of manœuvring : when nature had held undivided sway over her affections, and they had welled forth in all the purity of uncalculating fervour : but that was long, very long ago ; and seldom did even the memory of those days of beauty now visit her in her solitude ! Yet there were moments, and this was one of them, when she remembered how joyously she had twined the roses in her hair, and clasped the pearls about her neck, that she might look lovely in his eyes, whom alone she wished to please, whose smile alone she sought to win : still she wreathed her hair, and jewels sparkled in its thick folds, and flowers bloomed amid its braids ; and still the costly pearls rested on her bosom and on her arm ; but the feeling with which she had once worn them was gone. She had been happy then, for the feeling of the hour was beautiful in its sincerity ; in its utter carelessness of the world's gauds ; in its deep, dreamy devotedness : what was she now ? In that first rush of passion, she had knelt at the knee of a cold monitor ; she had listened to arguments with which affection indeed should have little to do ; the veil had been withdrawn from her young eyes, and she learned to prize her lover the less that he was poor ; yet still she clung to him for a while ; the heart resigns not readily the first idol which it

hath enshrined : still she attached him to her side by the same honeyed smiles which had first led him to her feet, but her own feelings were changed ; she loved him still, but not as she had once loved him ; she looked around her on the sparkling jewels, on the gaudy equipages, on the costly toys, which serve to lighten the tedium of unoccupied existence, and she began to doubt whether even the devotion of a heart like his could compensate for the want of these : she doubted not long ; when once youth lends itself to cupidity, its freshness is utterly destroyed ; like the rose which is gathered from its stem to adorn a perfumed chamber, it may, indeed, retain its beauty, but its sweetness is gone for ever. Strange that the world should blight so soon the kindest emotions of our nature ! Lady Clara grew cold, that might have been caprice ; but she grew cautious, and that at once implied indifference and falsehood : where pure and honest affection exist in their own high sincerity, the very name of caution is as treason.

• The tale of Lady Clara's " heart-service " is a common one : she alienated the lover of her youth, the chosen of her girlhood ; they parted for ever ; he had learned the bitter award of his poverty from the bright lips which he once thought so beautiful ; he had read the consequences of his penury in the soft eyes which he had loved so fondly, and he obeyed their bidding ; they parted, and in anger : there was no resting-place for memory in after years : the lovers grew not into friends ; there were upbraidings, and contemptuous tones, and the discarded suitor quitted his patrician and disdainful mistress without the courtesy of a farewell. And yet she had loved him, fondly loved him, for she yet remembered the night of weeping which succeeded his departure from England. He was now

wealthy and influential, but he thought of her no more. Lady Clara had met his gentle bride in the world's labyrinths; she had seen her happy smile, had looked on her blooming children, and she felt that she was in truth forgotten by him now. She turned again to the gay throng which had lured her heart from its allegiance; to the gauds and toys for which she had bartered her first dreams of happiness; she ran the giddy round with a smile upon her lips, but she felt not as she had once done—there was a void in her heart; and when, at the close of the season—her first season, of which she had dreamed from her girlhood up—she left town, and had leisure to ruminate, and remember, among the old oaks of her noble father's park—she discovered that her nature was less gladsome, her spirit less sanguine than it had been. Yet she repented not, for in that one season she had learned to value the lustre of the diamond above the crimson beauty of the rose—to repress the heart's laugh, and to disguise the tear which, but a short while before, she would have freely shed. There are sometimes months which are fraught with the concentrated consequences of years: such were those which Lady Clara had so lately passed. She had sacrificed to paltry ambition, and unworthy selfishness, the lover of her youth—utterly—irreclaimably—others might woo her, she was nobly born, and she was yet a novelty in the glittering crowd of fashion; and, if not handsome, she possessed that beauty which a French writer has not inaptly termed, *la beauté du diable*—youth. But would others love her as *he* had loved her? By slow, by almost imperceptible degrees, Lady Clara ultimately taught herself to care little how that question might be answered; and when, with a throbbing heart, she mingled once more among the aspirants for admira-

tion and establishments, she lent a willing ear to the flatterers who told her that the talented and graceful daughter of the Earl of Somerville must not lightly bestow her hand. Nevertheless, Lady Clara flirted with detrimentals, and sentimentalized with cornets of the Life Guards, for she was yet too unpractised to enter into all the delicate subtleties of a decided aspirante : her smiles were indiscriminate, her heart untouched ; her father warned her, her aunt chided her, but she danced and trifled through a second season unchanged and—unmarried. She was no longer a novelty.

Again Lady Clara loved, or fancied that she loved ; the fancy grew upon her at Lord Blacksley's seat in Hampshire ; the house was full of guests, eligible guests, for Lady Blacksley was too good a tactician to domesticate detrimentals with her marriageable niece—and this time Lady Clara lost her heart to a coronet. Lord Lancaster was a punster and a roué ; undesirable as a companion, and unprincipled as an associate ; but he was of age, and his property had been well husbanded during his minority—he had acres of timber, and no mortgages—available funds, and no debts ; in short, Lady Blacksley had speculated on a grande passion, and to appearances she had fulfilled her expectations ; he rode, and walked, and drove with Lady Clara, during the morning ; waltzed or sung with her during the evening ; suffered her to beat him at billiards, and always sat beside her at table ; they parted with smiles and compliments. Lady Clara began to speculate on the situation of her town house, and the colour of her carriage ; and when they met again in the gilded saloons of May-fair, she had almost decided upon both : again they smiled and sentimentalized together ; again Lady Clara laughed at his bad puns, and he selected her

music—all the world declared it to be a settled thing; dowagers grew sulky, and many a beauty bit her lip in anger, or curled it in derision; still the fateful words remained unsaid; and one eventful night, after parting from Lady Clara with more than ordinary unction at the Opera; after leaning for full five minutes at the open door of her carriage, to whisper another lingering good-night, at the risk of giving her a cough or a catarrh, Lord Lancaster hurried to the stage door, lifted Mademoiselle Constance, the Zephyrine of the ballet, into his cabriolet, transferred her thence at the portal of Mivart's into his travelling carriage; and when Lady Clara descended the next morning to her chocolate and dry toast, they were embarking at Dover, in the yacht of the Honourable Honorius Greville, his lordship's brother, for Naples! Lady Clara considered herself very ill-used: the countess her aunt was voluble in her expressions of disgust at such unprincipled conduct,—she forgot that she had been the adviser of her niece in a former *affaire du cœur*—the earl knitted his brows, and murmured something about “bad tacticians,” which was resented by his sister, and remembered through life by his daughter; Lord Ashburnham laughed, and quoted the old proverb of the cup and the lip; and meanwhile the wind was most provokingly fair for Italy.

“What could I have done which I did not do?” urged the countess, as she saw the brow of the earl contract with disappointed anger; “I am sure my conduct throughout the affair has been most exemplary: I have given Clara the best advice; and after all it is but one lover lost.”

“But that one was an earl, with as many thousands as ancestors;” was the sullen reply.

“And to be slighted for a danseuse!” indignantly remarked Lady Clara.

But ejaculations availed not; Lord Lancaster was gone!

Another season without suitor or settlement. Poor Lady Clara! there were presentations at every drawing-room by sanguine mammas of beautiful, or well-dowried daughters: girls whom she had visited in their nurseries, cast aside toys and pinafores, and elbowed her at Almack's; her case was desperate. By slow degrees the disagreeable conviction was forced upon Lady Clara that her chance of what the world designates *an eligible match* was a very slender one: that her father participated in the intrusive and impertinent conviction, was palpable in his lengthened visage, and her shortened allowance—his piquante allusions and caustic inferences—his paucity of compliments, and plenitude of reproaches. Lady Clara felt her case to be a hard one: surely she was not to blame? Her evil star had been in the ascendant, and no woman can war successfully against the stars. Lady Blacksley fidgeted, manœuvred, promoted water parties, and archery meetings, and pretty little *dejunées sur le gazon*, to which she invited the most eligible men of her set; and the eligibles came, and rowed in primrose kid-gloves, and landed as unsatisfactorily as they had embarked; they stood bow in hand and shot at the target, but still very wide of the mark;—they sat under tall trees on the damp grass, and ate cold viands no whit improved by having been crushed into hampers and baskets, drank Champagne somewhat the worse for its trajet from the cellar of the countess to the “delicious greensward” selected for the pastoral repast, but they ate and drank, and departed each one to his home. Lady Blacksley was in despair; so was her niece. During her sixth or seventh season, Lady Clara had indistinct visions of a love-match,

and Mr. Frank Harcourt—Harcourt was handsome, gentlemanly, and only wanted a little encouragement: of course the earl would never condescend to countenance such a marriage, and consequently it would entail the dear notoriety of an elopement,—so far the prospect was pleasant enough: but, alas! the lady remembered at six-and-twenty what she might perhaps have overlooked at sixteen; the unsatisfactory little circumstances of a wedded life generally outlasting the honey-moon; and the equally incontrovertible fact, that, as Frank had himself remarked on a former occasion to his friend Nichols, “not even love can live on flowers.”

Awkward calculations these, which serve to damp the bright dreams of romance,—fearful finger-posts, erected by Prudence on the wayside of Life, to caution youth and hope against the “steel traps and spring guns” of poverty. “*C’an’ira pas,*” murmured Lady Clara, at this stage of her cogitation, “it will never do!” And she did not try it, for the following spring she saw Mr. Joseph Nichols, and became deeply enamoured of *les beaux yeux de sa casette*!

“*Vogue la galère!*” cried Lord Ashburnham, when he learned the fact of Lady Clara’s engagement; my hands were nearly tied up, but my loving brother-in-law will help me to burst my chains.”

“Clara has shown herself to be a prudent and well-principled young woman,” remarked the earl in his most silvery tone: “by-the-way, I dare say that Mr. Nichols will be glad to invest a little money in my coal-mines.”

“I have just seen the corbeille at Hancock’s, my love:” exclaimed Lady Blacksley, as she came smiling into the room; “really quite regal! Mr. Nichols is a splendid judge of jewels!”

“He might have done it by deputy,” observed the bride-elect with a slight curl of the lip; “no one should eat macaroni in Naples!”

CHAPTER II.

THE business of the day was over, and Eustace with a swift step turned towards Westminster Bridge. Mrs. Sydenham had complained on his last visit of weakened and failing health, and her indisposition was a welcome and sufficient apology for so early a repetition of his inquiries. He might also again chance to see Agnes ; again be blessed with a glance, however transitory, of the beautiful orphan in whose happiness he felt that his own was now bound up. The narrow wicket swung back, and the heart of Eustace beat more rapidly as he remarked that the curtain of the window at which he had lately seen Agnes was closely drawn, as if to exclude the light from a sick chamber ; he entered the house with a noiseless step, the door stood partly open, when he reached the little parlour unannounced : seated near the table with her face buried in her hands, and her long hair almost concealing her slight figure, sat Agnes, his own Agnes ! She was unconscious of his entrance, and her low smothered sobs alone broke the silence of the narrow apartment. The bright golden gleam of the setting sun streamed full on the portrait of her mother, which hung above her chair, and flung a fainter light on her own gracefully bent head and slender form ; Eustace could have stood and gazed on her for ever, but the subdued voice of her grief broke the spell, and he hastily approached her.

"Agnes ! Miss Davenel !" he whispered, falteringly,—his heart prompted the gentler appellation,

but his reason as instantly rebuked it ;—" you are in sorrow, Miss Davenel—in tears—"

Agnes hurriedly raised her head : a crimson flush overspread her features, and as rapidly faded : she rose from her seat, the large tears of deep feeling rested on her cheek, but did not fall : she even tried to smile, but the smile was to the heart of Eustace even sadder than the tears ; " Well may I weep," she uttered with difficulty ; " a few hours, and I may be alone in the world,—deprived of my last best friend."

Eustace started.—" Surely you over-rate the indisposition of Mrs. Sydenham,—surely, Miss Davenel, your fears have led you to anticipate too melancholy a termination to an illness, which, however it may affect the spirits of the invalid, may not for an instant threaten her life,—let me beseech you to be less dark a prophet,—for your own sake,—for the sake of—those who love you."

" For my own sake, I would not make an effort," murmured out the heart-stricken girl : " but for hers who loves me—the one solitary being on earth to whom my happiness is a cause of anxiety—for her sake I can and will do much : think not that I weep in her presence : I have no tears to shed in the chamber of sickness, of death—they seem to scorch into my brain, and forget to fall ; it is only here, in solitude and silence, when I steal a moment from her bedside, that I give them way : she bids me leave her to take rest—Oh ! Mr. Smithson, what rest is there for the orphan, and the friendless, save in the grave !"

At this instant a bell rang faintly—" That is *her* bell !" exclaimed Agnes, and darted out of the room.

Eustace threw himself into the chair on which the mourner had been seated ; like her, he buried

his face in his spread hands ; but his reflections, unlike hers, were of a mingled character : even while she had infected him with her sorrows, and her fears ; even while he mourned over the probable death of her careful relative, something which was almost joy swelled at his heart when he remembered that Mrs. Sydenham would surely commit the future happiness of Agnes to his keeping, rather than leave her on the merciless world, an orphan and an outcast. He forgot his poverty, and his obscurity ; he thought only of folding the fair girl to his bosom, and of shielding her from evil.

His revery was interrupted by the entrance of the solitary attendant of Mrs. Sydenham, with a summons to the sick-chamber ; and from her he learned that the fears of Miss Davenel were likely to prove but too prophetic : that for three days the invalid had appeared to be hovering on the brink of the grave, that she was rapidly sinking, and that her intervals of ease were divided between tears and prayer.

"She weeps over my young lady, sir, and well she may ; for if there ever was an angel upon earth, I think it is Miss Agnes—she prays for her, too, and for herself ; not as people pray when life is strong in them, but like one who sees death in every ray of light, and feels it in every breath of wind—like one who expects every prayer to be her last."

Eustace swept his hand across his eyes, and motioned to the woman to lead the way.

The stairs were narrow, steep, and dark, and gave back a creaking sound as Eustace ascended : there is something melancholy in the gloom and stillness which tell at once of poverty and of suffering ; and every joyful thrill was rebuked in his bosom as he saw Agnes, pale and sad, standing upon

the threshold of the sick chamber, motioning to him to enter. He obeyed her uplifted hand, and in a moment he was beside the bed of the dying woman. He took one hasty glance round the apartment; the few articles of furniture which it contained were plain and of little value, yet every thing was arranged with a neatness, almost with an elegance, which assisted to disguise, if it failed totally to conceal, the scantiness of its conveniences—the hand of Agnes was visible in all to the heart of Eustace—in the snow-white hangings, looped back in graceful folds from the narrow window, in the well-arranged, if not costly appurtenances of the toilet, and in the fresh and fragrant flowers, which gave an air of cheerfulness even to the death-chamber. The hand of Mrs. Sydenham rested on an open Bible; but it was evident that it was not her glazing eye which had last rested upon the page, nor her failing voice which had given utterance to its holy truths; nature was visibly exhausted—life was ebbing away, calmly but surely; and Eustace started as he remarked the fearful change which a few short days had wrought: her eyes, which had so lately been keen and searching, were now sunken and covered with a dense film; her features stood out sharp and angular from her wasted cheeks, and the hand of death had evidently traced there those lines which the human countenance can bear but once.

What an awful thing is death! what a severing of all the gentle ties of kindred and of kindness! what a rending away of our deepest and holiest affections! what an overthrow of all our aims, and of all our hopes! The infant is smitten on the bosom of its mother, and its first articulate utterance is a death-groan—the youth and the maiden sink almost on the steps of the altar; the smile of love and the whisper of passion are hushed at once, and

the grave becomes their bridal bed—the father expires beside his own hearth, and amid his own offspring—the mother disappears from the cradle of her child, and from the arms of her husband—and lastly and more lingeringly, the aged and the infirm cast aside the staff and the crutch, and lie down in the place of graves! All the pride of power, all the majesty of mind, all the glory of greatness, are levelled at a blow;—the monarch's sceptre and the peasant's scythe, the soldier's weapon and the housewife's distaff, are equal in the grave—gold and ermine avail no longer to the princely corse—rags and wretchedness disguise no more the departed mendicant: each alike fades into nothingness, and fails to retard the work of corruption;—the prayers of the fond, and the curses of the unforgiving, are alike unheard in “the narrow house”—death, cold, inane, annihilating death, severs every tie, and levels every distinction.

And, strange it is, that however fondly, however faithfully we may have loved the dead—however bitterly we may have wept over the bier, and upon the grave, though our grief may cling to us for months, even for years, yet we mourn not after a time as we once mourned: we feel that the bonds which *death* hath snapped can never be reunited; the chain hath lost a link which can never be renewed—and a gentle shadow falls upon the picture of the past which veils from us the agony of the last separation.

It is in the awful moments when the soul is hovering on the threshold of immortality—when the spirit yet struggles with the flesh—when the countenance bears the stamp of the grasp which hath yet failed to fasten on the heart, and to stay its pulses for ever—when the world with its sights and sounds is still dimly visible, and earthly affections,

and earthly agonies, have not yet resigned their dominion over the flickering spirit—it is in those moments that the power of the destroyer is fully manifest: it is in the deep sobbings, the pale cheeks, and the heavy eyes of those who surround the dying bed, that we read all his unrelenting might; that we feel all his uncompromising severity. Time may bring alleviation to the mourners; but in the death-hour the clasp of the iron hand is upon every spirit. Eustace, unconnected with the sufferer, and comparatively even a stranger, yet felt this awful truth in his heart's core: every selfish wish, every weak rejoicing faded away at once. He remembered only that he was in the presence of one from whom all earthly things were passing away, and whose eyes would ere long open upon the mysteries and the mightiness of another world. It was a fearful reflection, and one which rebuked every lighter and vainer thought; and as his gaze rested on Agnes, beautiful in her sorrow, as she bent over her aged relative, he thought only of her affliction, and forgot his own hope, his own selfish anticipation.

“Enter, young man,” said Mrs. Sydenham, in a forced and hollow voice; “enter, and learn what it is to lay down the burden of life, as a weight too heavy to be longer borne—what it is to look with a calm eye on the receding pageant of existence, with its deceptive train of hopes, and wishes, and pursuits; which, however bright they may have appeared, however absorbing they may have been, are now worse than nothing. ‘Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,’ saith the preacher—we are slow to credit this, or at least to feel it; but the day comes when all doubt is swept away—it is thus with me: I have striven and have suffered—I have in turn smote and been smitten,—but it is over now; link by link the chain is falling away, which has for so

many years bound me to a world I have long ceased to love ;—and were it not for one tie, the last and the dearest—” and she turned her dim eyes upon Agnes, with that unearthly look which is remembered throughout existence, “how should I pant to shake off my bonds, and feel that my impatient spirit was at length about to gain its freedom.”

“My last, my best friend!” murmured Agnes.

“Say not your last, my child,” resumed the dying woman, after a pause ; but her words came even more feebly than they had before done, “nor, I trust, your best—I have but shared my penury with you—the crust and the cup of water which yet remained to me—we have been poor, and despised, and forgotten together.”

“But we have still been happy,” whispered the fair girl, as she sank on her knees near the pillow of her grandmother, and the hand of the aged woman rested upon her head ; “shall I ever be so happy when you are gone ? alas ! no.”

There was a pause, and Eustace feared to profane the stillness by his utterance : yet the silence was painful, only broken as it was at intervals by the hard breathing of Mrs. Sydenham, and the monotonous and oppressive ticking of a clock which stood upon the landing-place, near the sick chamber. After a few moments of partial repose, the invalid rallied with a powerful effort, and spoke again.

“I have, at times, mentioned to you vaguely, my dear child, the solitary friend yet left to you—may she indeed befriend you, my poor orphan girl ! She is affluent and childless—distantly related to your father,—and I die in the trust, that her coldness and neglect hitherto may have arisen from her distaste to me, as the mother of his wife—it is my last earthly hope—I *dare* not think otherwise—to you,

as the offspring of Henry Davenel, she must turn with affection and regard—she must—she will !”

The face of Agnes was now buried in the bed clothes : her sobs were audible, and her limbs quivered with the excess of her emotion.

“ Child of my sainted daughter !” gasped out the dying woman, “ for the sake of her who gave you life, spare me the sight of your grief : the flesh is weak, and rebels against the spirit ; subdue your sorrow, lest you make me vainly and idly cling to that life with which I have nearly done—to you, young man,” she added, extending her wasted hand to Eustace, “ I leave an important trust ; you will not wrong the dying !—you will not betray the dead ! I bequeath to you the temporary charge of this innocent and helpless girl—I have no other alternative—here”—and as she spoke, she drew from between the leaves of the Bible a sealed letter ; “ here is the important packet on which depends the future destiny of Agnes : it is my dying prayer to her hitherto obdurate relative, that she will receive her to her home, and to her heart, and be unto her as a parent ;—she is wealthy, and she can spare ; she is aged, and she must be merciful ; she is a Christian, and she will not visit the sins of the fathers upon the children : yet if the appeal remain unanswered”—a spasm passed over her features, and she grasped the hand of Eustace with hysteric violence, “ then, young man, then—”

“ Then,” said Eustace, solemnly, as he bent his knee beside the young mourner, “ she shall be as a sister to me in my humble home ; I will toil for her, I will solace her, I will protect her from the world ; I will be her friend, her safeguard, her—brother !”

“ Swear !” murmured the dying woman, with a sternness, which, contrasted as it was with her hitherto feeble utterance, sounded harsh and appalling.

"by that which is dearest to your own soul, I command you; swear that it shall be indeed thus!"

Eustace stretched forth his hand, and laid its outspread palm upon the holy volume: "By this sacred book," he said, fervently, "and by the memory of my own angel sister, I swear that I will be all this!"

"The Lord is merciful!" said the aged woman: "he rained manna in the wilderness, he drew water from the solid rock, he hath raised up a refuge for the orphan and the houseless."

Who might dare to break the stillness which ensued? She only whose spirit was even now scarcely of this earth; and thus they prayed together for awhile in silence, the deep, voiceless prayer of the heart in which the lip hath no part; they spoke not in that moment each to the other of a God, but they felt that he was beside them, and in the midst of them in that narrow room; and after awhile the hoarse whisper of the dying woman invoked a blessing on the head of him who held her hand; Eustace bent meekly as he listened. There is an awfulness in the benison of one whose lip will soon be closed for ever; all the riches of the earth would fail to purchase it, for the grave knoweth not the lure of gold, and careth not for the pomp of place; and this was the third time that a blessing had been invoked for him in the stillness of the death-room; and in that moment he felt that the appeal would be answered in mercy! He touched the hand of Agnes, and she looked up.—

"Mother," he said, "for in your benison you have called me son—I would not part from you with a shadow on my soul; you know in what a vision I have long indulged, you know—"

"That you love her, young man," interposed Mrs. Sydenham, "I have confidence that you love her in all honour and honesty; trust to the grati-

tude and purity of her own heart ; should you indeed win it, may He, whose blessing is omnipotent, be with you in your home for ever !”

Again Agnes buried her glowing face on the pillow of her grandmother ; but she did not withdraw her hand from Eustace ; her heart was too full of sorrow for idle feelings to intrude, and she only prayed as she knelt beside him, that she might in time become worthy of the tenderness and protection which he had vowed to her.

“ And now,” faltered Mrs. Sydenham, “ I have done with the world ; read to me, Mortimer Smithson, or pray with me, I am too weak to pray myself, let it be a thanksgiving that my pilgrimage is nearly over. Agnes, my child, to you I bequeath all which I have to offer, my last, best blessing ; you have been to me more than the whole world ; not a pang, not a tear have you ever cost me which you might have spared, and verily you will have your reward ! Let us pray together ; lay your hand in mine, Agnes, and you, Smithson ; lay them together that I may feel that you are both beside me, for my sight fails, and my soul is heavy ;—and now, I listen—”

Eustace prayed ; piously, fervently, he prayed ; and a smile settled on the pale thin lips of the sufferer ; he besought a blessed resurrection for the departing, a merciful admittance into that assembly of the chosen upon whose threshold she stood, a peaceful and calm passage into that grave which was the “ dark and narrow way” leading into eternity ; he prayed for the orphan girl ; that her spirit might be healed, and her grief chastened ; and if his voice faltered when he besought that the relative to whose protection she was bequeathed might indeed love and cherish her, and supply the place of the parents of whom she had been deprived by God’s

will, he nevertheless uttered the beseeching with all the fervour of sincerity ; and the conviction that he did so, struck on the heart of the dying woman, and she pressed his hand to the hand of Agnes with calm and happy faith in each. For himself he asked for strength to be to the orphan every thing which the fondest brother would have been, and all that the most sincere Christian could hope to be. It was a deep and holy prayer, and it bore away a soul upon its breath ; for when his voice ceased, and he turned to look on Agnes, he found that their hands were clasped in those of a corse !—One portion of his prayer was already answered !

CHAPTER III.

EVENING had begun to close ; the faint twilight filled the death-chamber with a saddening gloom, well suited to the feelings of its inhabitants. Eustace looked towards the fair girl whose hand he still held in his, and whose hysteric sobbings had gradually ceased beneath the voice of prayer. Fearful of disturbing by a word the transitory calm which had stolen over her, he knelt beside her, he bent over the bowed-down head whose long ringlets were scattered upon the coverlid of the death-couch ; and he breathed a second and a silent prayer, that he might one day be even more to her than a friend and a brother. But not long did the orphan remain thus unconscious of her fearful bereavement : she raised her head, and glanced anxiously towards her aged relative ; the truth struck to her heart at once,—the partially closed eyes,—the

severed lips,—the rigid position of the limbs, all told the tale of death, even to Agnes, who now beheld it for the first time. She did not shriek, nor profane the presence of the dead by vain and impious murmurings; but she rose with a calm step, and pressed her quivering lip to the brow and cheek of the corse, and then sank once more with a convulsive shudder into her former position.

Eustace rose from his knees and bent over her, “Miss Davenel—Agnes,” he murmured, “her sufferings are over—she is with the blessed; and now, listen to me; nay, indeed, indeed you must,” he added, as the poor mourner withdrew the hand which he had taken, and at the sound of his voice burst into a passionate fit of weeping; “for *her* sake I conjure you—for *my* sake I implore you, to let me lead you into another room.”

Agnes rose from her knees; fixed a long, anguished look on the countenance of the corse, and then leaning on the arm of Eustace, with a feeble step quitted the apartment. On the stairs they encountered the servant and an aged nurse, for whom, in her alarm, Miss Davenel had sent, to attend upon her grandmother, and who did but arrive in time to prepare her for the grave.

The parlour, into which Eustace led the soul-stricken girl, looked even more wretched than its wont: the candle which stood upon the table was flaring wildly with the wind, while its long and un-snuffed wick, beaten down by the current of air, was wearing away a burning channel down its side; the grate contained only a few smouldering ashes, for the fire had been long unfed,—and the dying light yet gleamed coldly, and as if in mockery of the wretchedness within, through the uncurtained window. Eustace involuntarily shuddered, and Agnes raised her eyes to his as though she understood

and answered the feeling which oppressed him. Shocked at his own weakness, Mortimer placed his companion on the sofa, where, with her head pillowed in the cushion, she soon forgot all but the misfortune which had just befallen her, and her deep and low sobs came slowly and painfully to his ear. Eustace meanwhile drew the curtains across the window to exclude the cold gray gleam ; lighted a fresh candle which stood upon the sideboard, and with much difficulty produced at least the semblance of fire in the narrow grate. All feeling of self-distrust had disappeared in the exigency of the hour,—Agnes had been, for a time at least, bequeathed to his protection,—and even fettered as he was by a narrow income, and an obscure lot, he yet mourned that it was indeed only for a time,—and with this reflection he cast away a thousand fears engendered by his own morbid sensibility ;—he thought of the departed Mrs. Sydenham with gratitude and respect—gratitude that she had believed him to be worthy of so precious a trust,—and respect that she was the relative of Agnes. Of Agnes herself he almost feared to think ; it was enough that he was near her, that he could look on her, listen to her ;—even in her sorrow and her tears, he felt that to him she was more dear than aught else on earth—he remembered too, that when beside the bed of death, he had ventured to own that he loved her, the avowal had remained unrebuked, and that Agnes had not withdrawn the hand which was clasped in his. But this unknown relative to whose care she was consigned, as it were, by a voice from the grave—this proud and wealthy stranger, who had hitherto turned from her in contempt and coldness—how would she scorn the nameless, penniless suitor of her beautiful ward ! His heart chilled as the thought crossed him ; but ere long another and a brighter

reflection chased away the gloom. Might she not still prove inexorable? might not the world-seared spirit resist even this last appeal? He almost believed that it would be so—and yet, could he bear to owe the hand of Agnes to mere necessity, or at best, to expediency? Could he brook such a feeling as each casual cloud passing over her young brow might arouse, if he should win her *thus*? Eustace rebuked himself for the wish—even for the thought.

What an eventful evening had this proved to him! He almost doubted that he did not dream; but the deep and stifled sobs of Agnes painfully breaking in upon his revery, convinced him of the truth of all which had happened, of all which might yet occur. He drew near the sofa; he swept back the long loose hair which veiled the pale brow of the mourner, and he whispered her name gently, as though he feared to arouse her to a fresh paroxysm of grief. Agnes heard him, and looked up. Again he murmured to her, soothingly and softly, words of affection and peace; and the fair girl strove to thank him, but her quivering lips alone betrayed the effort; then they sat side by side for awhile in silence; and the stillness of the apartment was only broken by the heavy tread of the busy females in the room above, who were preparing the corse for burial. Eustace shivered in every pulse as he guessed the nature of their occupation; but she whose heart it would have wrung had she o'ermastered her grief sufficiently to be conscious of external circumstances, was too wretched to heed their movements.

“Will you not endeavour to take some rest now, my dear Miss Davenel?” said Eustace; “you look pale and worn from fatigue as well as sorrow, and must husband your strength for the trials which you have yet to undergo—let me smooth the pillow,

and draw the sofa towards the fire ; I will watch by you that you may not be rudely awakened—fear not,” he added, with a forced smile, “ to trust to my vigilance and care, for I have been long exercised as a nurse.”

“ I cannot rest,” murmured Agnes ; “ my heart is too full for sleep : *she* is gone who was wont to be my guardian and my guide. Mr. Smithson, you have lost your nearest and dearest—you can feel for me, you can weep with me, you will bear with my repinings, with my tears, for have I not lost all ?”

“ Not all, Miss Davenel,” replied Eustace, in a tone of reproachful tenderness ; “ not *all*. When I turned from my father’s grave—when I had seen the last earth heaped upon it, and the last sod placed over it, I turned away, unknowing one heart which could feel for me, one ear which would listen to me—I was *alone* ; the busy world was before me, and about me—there were fond ones around many hearths ; parents, and children, and brothers ; but beside *me* stood not one who loved me, yet in that hour there was comfort—in that day, dark and desolate as it was, I remembered that there was a God !”

“ I am rebuked,” said Agnes, meekly, as she bent her head, and extended her hand to Eustace ; “ in the selfishness of my sorrow I forgot that He had raised up a friend for me, unmerited as it was unhopd for—forgive me, for my grief has withered me—yet think not that I am ungrateful either to Him who sent the comforter, or to you who speak comfort—and if the tears and blessings of the orphan and the outcast—” and Agnes threw herself passionately on her knees, and would have added more, but Eustace wound his arm round her, and raised her up.

"Agnes!" he said gently, "spare alike yourself and me, I beseech of you. From this hour, let the compact into which we entered at the death-bed of your grandmother be fulfilled by both of us—while I have life you shall be to me the dearest object of my existence—I will struggle to remove every thorn from your path, every cloud from your brow—and for yourself, tell me, Agnes,"—and he raised the hand which he held respectfully to his lips, "only tell me that our departed friend did not promise me too much when she said that you would trust me, and be to me as a sister?"

"So help me heaven!" faltered out Miss Davenel, "I will confide in you—I will obey you—but I must have time for tears ere I can school my bursting heart into submission—we have been poor, Mr. Smithson; the world has looked scorn upon us, and the proud have passed us by, but we have been happy: we have lived in the past, and in the future, and we have borne the present as we best might, regarding it but as the sequel of the one, and the prelude to the other. Ours has been a humble hearth, but the voice of unkindness never came there; we were every thing to each other—and now—now,—" and she wrung her hands, and again the large drops of sorrow fell upon her bosom.

"And again a humble and a happy hearth may be yours," said Eustace, soothingly; "or it may be," and a cloud crossed his own brow, "that you will ere long be the idol of a prouder sphere—you may yet become the favoured child of fortune; but should you fail to do so, you will at least be the cherished inmate of a lowlier roof and an humbler home—even that home which you have promised to share with me—in which you have promised to endeavour to feel towards me as a sister. And

now, tell me, Miss Davenel, is it your will that I should at once ascertain what your future prospects are likely to be? Shall I, without farther delay, visit the relative who is to decide your destiny? Shall I learn her sentiments, her wishes, now, ere the last duties are paid to—”

“Not now—not now,” sobbed Agnes: “I could not bear that the eye of a stranger should turn coldly on her in her shroud; I would not be chidden for my tears by the stern voice of one whom my heart knew not—you will bear with me, and feel for me—leave me not, I entreat you, to the rude neglect, or cold pity of others. Oh! who will be to me half so dear as the friend to whom *her* love bequeathed me, to whom her dying words were breathed in blessing and in trust?”

Eustace felt his heart swell. Yes, even in this hour of anguish, she clung to him! The prospect of augmented comfort, of added luxury, was as nothing to her—in the guilelessness of her nature she looked not beyond his voice for the words of consolation, beyond his tenderness for solace and support! How he longed to clasp her to his breast, and tell her all he felt, and all he hoped! How he turned away from her anxious and confiding gaze to conceal the delight which even now, surrounded as he was with care and death, could not be wholly suppressed!

“No, suffer not one intrusive gaze on her pale corse,” pursued Agnes, making a violent effort at composure; “let not the tardy charity of a proud stranger mock by a pompous train of hired and callous mourners the poverty of her latter years, or the heart-wrung tears of those who knew and loved her; humble as was her home, so be her grave. She will sleep peacefully beneath the sod heaped above her by affection, but more than that would

be indeed a mockery now,—a mockery alike to her and to me.”

“Be calm, my dear Miss Davenel,” said Eustace, anxiously, as he marked the unnatural lustre of her eye, and the fevered hectic on her cheek; “it is sufficient that you have wished to be solitary in your grief; we will postpone this inquiry until—until—” he paused; he knew not how to express his meaning, but Agnes with forced calmness terminated the sentence.

“Until *she* is in her grave, you would say. I thank you for the promise. I am indeed a heavy charge upon your kindness, but a few days will probably release you.”

Eustace could have answered by mourning that the probability to which she alluded did indeed exist; but he felt that this was no moment for such a theme, and he forbore.

The evening wore away; and the night, the long, dark night, longer and darker in the house of death than elsewhere, set in, in all its dreariness; and Agnes shuddered as she remembered that she should ere long be indeed alone with her sorrow. At length the moment of separation came: Eustace rose from beside her to depart, and as she lifted her eyes to his when he bade her farewell until the morrow, a fresh pang smote on her heart.

“Good-night,” he said, gently, as he took her hand; “I will not bid you dry your tears in this your deep grief for to-night; but I will ask of you to combat with your feelings until we meet again: to endeavour to take some rest, that you may gain strength by sleep to bear up against the trials of the day, and to prove that the lessons of her whom you mourn have availed you in the hour of suffering.”

“I will strive to be all you wish,” murmured Agnes; “yet, when you are gone, who will console

me in my sorrow? Who will lighten the anguish of my spirit, by gentleness, and solace me by the words of comfort? She who was wont to do all this—”

“Is gone!” said Eustace, solemnly: “would you recall her from that heaven which she has won, and where she is at rest? Surely not: farewell, then, until to-morrow.”

“I shall pray for you, and watch for you, until you return,” exclaimed Agnes, as she clasped his extended hand within both hers: “as the child wearies for its absent parent, so shall I weary for you. Are you not my only hope, my only refuge?”

“God bless you, Agnes!” said Eustace, as he turned rapidly away; “to-morrow we shall meet again.”

He spoke a few hurried words to the servant whom he encountered as he crossed the passage; he commended the solitary mourner to her care and tenderness, and, for the first time in his life, Eustace added a bribe to his entreaty: in the next moment he had left the house.

CHAPTER IV.

“AND so Nichols has really purchased the ‘vote and interest’ of Lady Clara Ashburnham’s right honourable relatives,” said Lionel Lovell, as he sat in a bay-window of the club which he frequented, with a glass of iced lemonade in one hand and the *Courier* in the other; “and we are to have what the post calls a ‘marriage in high life,’ and what I call a reciprocal barter, licensed by custom.”

“Purchased her!” echoed a guardsman: “ay,

but even 'my father-in-law the earl' may be bought too dear: the estate must be taken with its encumbrances, to wit—"

"No scandal, Neville, no scandal," said Morton Mowbrey, with a slight, a very slight sneer; "remember, ours is the club par excellence, where we destroy neither reports nor reputations,—celebrated throughout the whole quartier for its urbanity and gentleness,—a congregation of anti-personal satirists, liberal logicians, and unwounding wits,—warriors without ferocity,—divines without bigotry,—and younger brothers without envy."

"Are you talking of Eutopia, Mowbrey?" demanded Lovell.

"No: even of our own immaculate club—of ourselves: surely, my sketch is a likeness."

"Lady Fanny Thornton and a few other victims may be disposed to deny the resemblance," laughed Neville: "why, there is not a more scandalous coterie in all St. James's-street."

"Treason, by the gods!" shouted Mowbrey; "but if indeed I am so very bad a limner, you must e'en anatomize the bride elect at your leisure; but pray have mercy on (as the weekly papers call poor Lady Clara) the 'belle affiancée,' for it is nearly her last chance."

A volley of laughter echoed the remark: "hear! hear! the immaculate member of the immaculate club,—the anti-sandalous item of the anti-sandalous sum total of —'s. Egad! Mowbrey has given you the scent now, gentlemen," said Neville, "and there is no fear but that the whole pack will follow."

"Nichols will often have the wind in his teeth, if I am any judge," said a tall, slight man, with a foreign air, and a pair of most orthodox mustaches; "it will not be very smooth sailing, especially if he

once suffer her ladyship to put her hand to the helm."

"Lancaster speaks like an oracle," said Lovell, as Lord Lancaster, the old lover of Lady Clara, sank back on the luxurious sofa of crimson satin, from which he had half risen, with a pretty little affectation of languor; "and as he has cruised with the lady in the straits of flirtation, he must be a competent judge."

"Lord Lancaster flirt with Lady Clara Ashburnham!" exclaimed Mowbrey, in affected surprise; "the travelled and fastidious Lord Lancaster!"

"Ay, even so; but it was in my boyhood: I took her up as I should an inferior violin, for the purpose of practice; and I am grateful to her that under her tuition I ran over the whole gamut of petit soins till I mastered the scale: I learned to interpret the elevation of an eyebrow, the curl of a lip, and the motion of a little finger; and I have subsequently," he added, with a smile of self-complacency which displayed a set of Cartwright's most white and even teeth to peculiar advantage beneath the black moustache, "turned my knowledge to some account."

"It is to be hoped that Nichols will not follow your example, and treat her little ladyship to a second edition of *le garçon volage*," said Neville.

"No, no," responded Lord Lancaster, with a peculiar intonation of mingled scorn and carelessness; "the game is now an even one—he stakes his gold against her genealogy, and the exchange is fair enough:—in my case—but enough of this—I am no coxcomb."

"I should as soon suspect your lordship of being a roué," calmly remarked Lovell.

A suppressed laugh followed.

"Eh? what?" asked Lord Lancaster, languidly, as he raised himself on his elbow, and looked round.

him : " ha ! very good, very good ;—upon my soul, Lovell, you're devilish droll—you'll never subside—never." And with this assurance the speaker himself subsided once more, and fell back upon his cushions.

" What broke off your affair with Lady Clara ?" asked Neville, abruptly. Every one appeared startled by the question save the individual to whom it was addressed, and who considered it as infinitely too insignificant a circumstance altogether to be worthy of the slightest emotion of anger, or the most shallow attempt at secrecy.

" A prettier face and a more convenient compact," was the unconcerned reply. " I put Lady Clara, with a bad temper and a special license, into the scale against Mademoiselle Constance, a pretty ancle, and a gauze petticoat ; and her ladyship kicked the beam. It was an every-day adventure ; and I had quite forgotten both the parties concerned in a twelvemonth."

" The Post is unusually eloquent on the subject of this marriage," said Lovell, after the silence of a moment ;—" it has really to-day outdone its unapproachable self: Lady Clara is 'interesting and accomplished,' the earl is a 'distinguished statesman,' Ashburnham is a 'high-spirited young nobleman,' and even poor gossiping Lady Blacksley, who has talked discord into a score of families in her time, with the kindest intentions in the world, is 'amiable and popular,'—it is immeasurably beyond a jest."

" And what learn you by the precious paragraph ?" asked Mowbrey.

" Every thing that is interesting ; the account of Lady Clara's trousseau might serve as an advertisement of Maradin and Victorine's respective show-rooms ; and the enumeration of Mr. Nichols' plate

would induce one to believe that it was an inventory of the 'stock in trade' (I believe that is the term) of his lamented uncle. I should think that George Robins, that prince of puffers, must have been fee'd to write the paragraph,—one would imagine that all their possessions were about to come into the market."

"Probably some of them will, before long," said Neville.

"Very possibly," murmured Lord Lancaster, petting his mustache. "Heavens! how barbarous—how *English*!"—his lordship had no stronger term by which to convey his contempt.

"By the gods! yonder goes Nichols himself," said the young guardsman: "what a roan that is! there is not its match in town,—I should like to buy it from him."

"Offer him an introduction to your grandfather the duke, and he'll let you have it a bargain," said Lovell, with a light laugh; "take him to her grace's opera-box on a thronged night (if such a thing should ever occur again), and he'll make you a present of it."

Neville shrugged his shoulders: "They would never forgive me—what action it has! Oh! he has gone into Sam's,—the bella cara doubtlessly wishes an illustrated copy of the 'Pleasures of Memory.'"

"The 'Pleasure of Possession,' would be more acceptable," said Mowbrey; "for, by Lancaster's account, she has little delight to look back upon."

"I believe she thought she was sure of me," yawned his lordship—"too sure,—but, on my honour, she deceived herself; I could never have married her; they say that the plantain changes its bark every year; and I, on the same principle, change my fancy as often. Marry? oh, no!—there are two things

which never wear out,—a wife and a chancery suit."

"Lord Somerville has played his cards well to catch so golden a gudgeon for her *passée* ladyship, after all," said Mowbrey.

"Lord Somerville deserves no credit in the business," retorted Neville; "I will tell you how the affair was managed: Lady Blacksley got introduced, she introduced her niece, then she gave the man a dinner, and placed Lady Clara beside him at table; then they had pic-nic breakfasts at her villa at Twickenham, and sailing parties in her barge on the river, and in her wilderness, and *petit soupers* in her *boûdoir*—"

"Just the way they managed me!" murmured Lord Lancaster.

"And to crown all," pursued Neville, "they were at last self-invited to Nichols' picture-gallery; a notable scene, by-the-way, for flirtation, amid the 'sublime and beautiful!' And we all know that the little countess is slightly deaf—"

"*Et puis?*" interposed his lordship.

"*Et puis,*" said Neville, laughing, "at the villa Lady Clara sported sentiment, and lived upon rose-leaves, and Mr. Nichols dreamed of the ethereality of the *haute noblesse*; and at Mr. Nichols's mansion she took pine, and imbibed punch *à la romaine*, and the citizen pondered over the extreme condescension of an earl's daughter who could eat in the house of a silversmith's nephew, and smile upon the possessor of thirty thousand a year: the aunt was at his elbow; and we know the efficiency of old maids and widows in promoting a match."

"Wood, pointed with sulphur!" said Lovell, quietly.

"And so the aunt got up the farce, eh?" asked Mowbrey.

"Farce?" echoed Neville, "more like a tragedy in five acts: no man can rationally look on marriage as *lucis spes certa serenæ*, and least of all Joseph Nichols."

And thus the light-hearted and the idle speculated and sneered; while Lady Clara Ashburnham and her plebeian lover, enveloped in their own visions, believed themselves to be envied and proné'd over one-third of London; and who could desire to be even mentioned by the remaining two-thirds of the population? Not surely the élite of high birth and high fortune. Thus the laugh and the jibe passed on more rapidly than the ejaculations of admiration and jealousy which haunted the dreams of the betrothed; and the busy tongues of their hundred and one friends were still loud with the theme, when the Right Reverend Father in God, the Bishop of — and a special license, bestowed on Mr. Nichols the fair hand of Lady Clara Ashburnham; and on the daughter of the Earl of Somerville the worldly possessions of the nephew of Mr. Roberts.

Lady Blacksley had been a perfect imbodyment of quicksilver during the whole proceedings; she had suggested the settlements, cavilled at the clauses, hinted at an arrangement in case of separation; and finally, although not to the extent she wished, carried all her points.

Mr. Nichols had been generous, even profuse; Lady Clara had been gracious and gentle; the earl satisfied and sententious; and the whole household divided between their satisfaction at the liberality of the bridegroom, and joy at the transplantation of the bride. The consumption of white riband and congratulations, of Champagne and compliment, was immense; and finally the travelling carriage of Mr. Nichols, drawn by four high-bred bays, swept from the door of Lord Somerville, followed by a britscha

tenanted by Mademoiselle Imogine, and Monsieur Parfait, the officiating priest and priestess of the toilet to the newly-married pair.

For the first time Lady Clara had leisure to think as the bricks and mortar of the leviathan of cities began to yield to the green and sunny meadows of the suburbs ; for the first time her lip quivered beneath its blonde, and a dark cloud gathered upon her brow. The deed was done ! The vision of her fresh and glowing youth rose broad and palpable to her mental view ; she remembered the high aspirations, the ambitious hopes of her girlhood ; she thought of him whom she had loved as woman loves but once ; she recalled the days, when even duped as she had finally been by Lord Lancaster, she had nevertheless revelled in the belief of his affection, the affection of a man, her equal in birth and breeding ; and she started with a very anti-bridish expression of countenance to answer the kind pressure of her bridegroom's hand, and the tender tone of his voice, which aroused her from her reverie. It was an unfortunate moment for such cogitations, and poor Mr. Nichols met not altogether with the response which he had anticipated ; the words of his fair bride fell coldly and charily from her lips, and she withdrew the hand that he had taken to arrange a rebel ringlet. Her eyes turned not on him ; she was contemplating the hedgerows as they flew past them ; and when she did utter a sentence, it was with a pretty smile of scorn which developed the earl's daughter in all her aristocracy of feeling to the astonished citizen. She talked of the worthlessness of wealth without taste ; of the barbarism of splendour without judgment ; of the free-masonry of high-birth, and the degeneracy of the " people ;" mystified him with exclusive hints, and exclusive habits, and finally convinced him that it is very pos-

sible for a man to be exceedingly ill at ease even on the day of his marriage with his bride beside him.

Still Joseph Nichols trusted that this somewhat ill-timed waywardness might be the mere petty prerogative of a spoiled mistress, suddenly transformed into an idolized wife; how could he think otherwise? Had she not assured him a thousand times that she loved him for himself? The recollection brightened his spirit at once, and he raised his eyes again from his boot to his bride, and busied himself with the arrangement of her ermine-bordered mantle. But he did even this ill, for Lady Clara was in no mood to be pleased; she felt deeply, bitterly, now that she at length suffered herself to think that she had lost caste by this ill-assorted marriage: she received the attentions of her bridegroom as the merely anxious services of an inferior being; and if one stray feeling of complacency yet found a place in her bosom, it was when she remembered Lady Blacksley's uncompromising stand for a liberal separate maintenance; the first kind tone which she had addressed to Nichols was when she announced her intention of prevailing on her "dear aunt" to be her frequent guest.

Charmed with the softening accents, the bridegroom reiterated the hope that the countess would indeed be much, very much with his dear Clara: ere he had ceased speaking, a fresh recollection had sprung up in the mind of the lady, and all was again gloom.

And thus they travelled on, emulating a day in early spring, cloudy and chill, with now and then a burst of brighter weather, giving a momentary promise of sunshine, and vanishing with the hope which it had created. The journey ended; they passed the gates of an extensive and well-kept park: there was the ringing of bells, and the cheering of

tenantry ; and the lady bent forward graciously, and smiled : they swept along among oaks and elms, venerable in their beauty, and tall sycamores whose summits bowed with the breeze, as though in homage to their new mistress ; under the massy shadow of groups of chestnut-trees, whose white and scattered blossoms formed a showy carpet beneath the swift feet of the horses, and beside clusters of that most graceful of all trees, the lovely weeping birch, with its dark, slight, elastic boughs, and bright green leaves. The nimble deer fled before them into the dim and distant glades ; and the startled water-fowl skimmed with wild cries over the bosom of the lake, which lay outstretched beneath the sunshine in beautiful repose, bearing upon its placid breast a thousand little fairy islands of the beautiful lotus. The turrets and towers of the mansion rose vast and dark in the distance, nestled amid antique trees. All was in unison : no trace of the parvenu was there ; and even the lip of Lady Clara relaxed from its chilling sneer. At length they reached the portal, and when Nichols lifted his patrician bride from the carriage, she stood among a crowd of menials in gorgeous liveries, where every eye was turned on her in homage. The vanity of Lady Clara was satisfied ; she was a queen among her slaves ! She indulged in a thousand graceful little whims, but they were all gentle and interesting ; and when Nichols pressed her to his heart, and welcomed her to her home, if she slightly shrank from his embrace, it was so slightly that no lover would have chidden the recoil, or misdoubted its motive.

CHAPTER V.

TURN we again from the house of feasting to the house of mourning; it is but an epitome of our social usances. Truly each day, did we know, or knowing, could we comprehend its history, might furnish us with more extraordinary, and romantic, and varied events, than all the brains of all the novelists in Europe ever engendered—than all the vivid fancies of the Arabian story-tellers ever combined. I have often thought as I traversed a street of the metropolis, how much of joy and sorrow, of anxiety and of despair, I stood among; how every passer-by varied in his disposition, in his feelings, and his pursuits, from those other atoms of humanity who elbowed him aside to clear their own path. I have watched the lined brow, teeming with thought, of the short, thick-set, heavy-limbed, but keen-eyed trader, and my thoughts have travelled at once over land and sea, and I have pictured to myself the individual interest of this one man on the deep waters, and amid the wild woods and lakes of the new world; I have seen him make way for the proud and perfumed tool of fashion, and my reflections have at once returned to home, and luxury, and folly. The rapid and dazzling equipages of the rich have flashed past me,—what a little world of wretchedness does not London every day pour forth in those brilliant vehicles! It is easy to cheat the eye of the worldling with forced smiles and tinsel elegance, but the heart—the heart is not so lightly duped; be it shrouded in satin, or covered with

rag, it will be heard, and that audibly. World within world ! the coaches laden alike within and without, bound for distant cities, whirl almost recklessly along, and who shall say by what feelings, and hopes, and anxieties they are freighted ? Whether they bear those thoughtful and wearied travellers to the arms of their beloved ones, or to an endless and heart-sickening exile ! The idle loiterer, the subtle man of law, the physician busy on his errand of life or death, the bankrupt merchant, the thriving trader, the study-worn philosopher, the careless comedian, the sable-clad divine ; what tales could not these tell of one day of their existence !

Look we to the clustered and clinging houses :—at one door stand the mutes, with their white bands and staves—death has been there—not wreathing his long fingers in the gray and scattered hairs of age, but in the bright and flowing tresses of youth. Pass your eye along, and what see you at yonder open portal ? A crowd of liveried and lounging servants with bridal favours at their breasts. What hear you through the unclosed casements ? Music, light, joyous music, such as the spirit loves in an hour of happiness ; and at intervals a peal of thoughtless laughter :—but a few houses separate the mourners from those who are feasting,—the same sky is over them, the same breeze cools them, the same grave is yawning for them. Cross to the opposite pavement ; there is another thronging of the passers-by about a door-way,—the men of law are there,—the debtor's house is filled with unwelcome and unbidden guests ; rude hands are upon the household gods of the ruined man ; all the necessities, all the little elegancies are torn from him—all, all ! the world has gone hardly with him ; he has trusted too much to its forbearance, and he must pay the price of that trust ; he has exchanged his home for a

prison ; his home ! his wife and his little ones have no shelter save in their God ; or that fearful alternative which bids them share with the idle and the vicious, that questionable boon, the shelter of a work-house—the provision of their parish. Hark ! there is a shriek—they are putting her forth—and across, from the opposite pavement, come the sounds of music, and laughter, and merriment. And this is the work of one day ! these are the events crowded into twelve short hours ! Hurry on, for the reflection is maddening,—step aside, or you will disturb the gravity, and perhaps provoke the wrath of the quaintly-attired marmozet of this wandering Savoyard, whose bright black eyes, and good-humoured smile, fortunately for him, suffice to counteract the effect of his villanous barrel-organ, whose tones grate in the teeth like sand. And now throw some pence to this coarse and kilted Bavarian girl, whose “Buy a broom,” despite her ungainly and unpromising appearance, dances into your ears in sounds as musical as though they issued from the parted lips of a sylph, while she twirls her tiny ware lightly before your eyes with a skill which compensates for its absurdity. Yonder again is Punch, the king of mirth and mischief, who never fails to attract a crowd around him ; the cracked drum, and shrill pandean pipes which form his band, act like magic on the ears of the idlers ; while his jokes, unlike those of his superiors, appear to partake of the nature of wine, and to be the better relished for their antiquity :—listen ! how heartily the laugh peals out—every broken head which he makes is received with a chorus of merriment ; and the light sounds of childish glee are blended with the hoarser tones of hearty, manly enjoyment. Il Signor Punchinello is the true king of the people ; he never loses his popularity. Do you hear in the distance

the short, quick, duplicate knock of the postman? What tides of feeling may be turned by his visit! Another world of hope, and sorrow, and speculation may grow out of his diurnal progress. And all this in a day—even in an hour!

Whether these reflections, or such as these, crossed the mind of Frank Harcourt as he drove to Baker-street, were a problem difficult of solution. One thing however is certain, namely, that he detested all weeds and wailing almost as much as he did a long bill, or an ill-cut coat; and that he resolved to replace the widow's present ruminations on death and legacies by brighter visions, if he really possessed the influence which he flattered himself was now his. Mrs. Wilkins was alone; and, as he had anticipated, to use the words of Haynes Bayly,

“She received him when he came
With a welcome warm as ever.”

In short, Frank, with his fashion and his flattery, had become necessary to the widow, and he knew it; her money had become necessary to him, and she knew it not; and accordingly she never suspected for an instant that her valued friend Mr. Harcourt laughed at her in his sleeve for an old fool, and fairly wished her in her grave, and her money in his own pocket. Miss Parsons indeed suspected so, but she did not mention it!

When Harcourt had a point to carry, his was not eloquence *questo entra per un orecchio e esce dall' altro*, and he had not been half an hour in the drawing-room of Mrs. Wilkins before she talked less of her nephew Wilkins, and more of his particular friend prince somebody, whose name she could not pronounce; then they digressed to names in general, and the widow declared that all foreign names were odious; terrible to spell, and impossible to pro-

nounce ; and Frank ventured to remark on the misfortune of amiable persons of refined mind being compelled to answer to a plebeian and disagreeable name, perfectly unsuited to themselves. The first arrow fell short of the mark ; the widow was terribly obtuse ; she even cited a score of Hobbs's, and Dobbs's, and Browns, and Greens, but uttered not the (Frank thought) infinitely worse, Wilkins !

"Your name is very pretty," said the widow ; "Harcourt—quite a name for a novel."

"And yet, after all," remarked Frank, looking sad and sentimental, "what's in a name ?"

"Very true," said Mrs. Wilkins. "My two dear sisters, who are dead and gone, married men with shocking names, but they were both aldermen of the city of London, and one of them was lord-mayor."

Poor Frank ! the thought was horror to him—aldermen and lord mayors ! and the widow talked of it as matter of gratified ambition, and family aggrandizement—*his* widow ! He could have beaten her : but he only smiled, and elevated his eyebrows. He tried again.

"Harcourt is pretty, certainly ; aristocratic, euphonious ; it tells well in society—it gives consequence—"

"It is certainly prettier than Wilkins," acquiesced the widow.

I have struck the target, thought Frank : I will try again.

"I have often been surprised that you, my kind friend, ever consented to bear such a name ; I can scarcely recognise you by it."

"It is frightful, I really think it is," said the widow, thoughtfully.

Hit in the bull's-eye ! mused the mental toxophilite : and he changed the subject. He spoke of the marriage of Nichols ; detailed the dress of the bride,

and the quality of the breakfast; enumerated the bridal guests, and criticised the bridesmaids. Mrs. Wilkins was in ecstasies.

"It is strange what a feeling of isolation crept over me as I sat beside the Countess of Blacksley, and assisted her ladyship in serving some potted game," he continued: "I looked at my friend Nichols, and although during the whole period of our acquaintance I had never envied him his wealth, yet yesterday I envied him a companion—a wife, in short—who was to be the sharer and the solace of his days; I looked at him until I felt alone in the world."

The widow sighed audibly, but continued silent.

"Surely all other happiness must fade before wedded happiness!" continued Frank, with the velocity and violence of a high-pressure steam-engine; all ties must be weak and poor indeed, compared with the marriage-tie; to have every thought, every hope, every anticipation, in common with the dear one whom you have chosen from amid a world; to have, in short, but one spirit and one heart; to be every thing to each other. Was it not enough to sadden me, when I remembered, as I looked upon my friend, that I might never share the feelings which were his, as he sat there beside his bride?"

"Amiable young man!" ejaculated the widow, half-audibly.

"And I feel that I could love so intensely, so entirely," pursued Frank, who felt that the moment was critical; "that a thousand springs of affection are locked up within my breast, which require only to be allowed to well forth, to absorb my whole being: the consciousness withers me!"

"My dear young friend!" said the widow, emphatically, as she laid her hand on his.

"Do not speak to me thus," exclaimed Frank,

affecting to start from his seat, while she gently held him back ; " I cannot bear it, at least not now."

" Tell me, Harcourt," said the widow, " is the bride *very* beautiful ?"

" Far, very far from beautiful," responded the young barrister ; " Nichols loved her for her—for her amiable disposition, her refined mind, her feminine ideas—for herself."

" Mr. Nichols is a wise man," said Mrs. Wilkins, almost sententiously ; " the young men of the present day are too apt to select their wives as I should choose a bouquet, by its beauty."

" Say, rather, the fools of the day, my dear madam," interposed Frank ; " Heaven forbid that such extravagance should be general."

" You are too generous to see the world as I see it, my dear Frank," replied the widow. My dear Frank!—could he believe his ears ? Mrs. Wilkins smiled, and continued : " Mr. Nichols is a wise man, and he will benefit by his wisdom ; he had no occasion to sacrifice any thing to fortune, and of his own accord he has resolved not to sacrifice any thing to mere exterior ; he has married from affection and regard, and depend upon it, he and Lady Clara will be models of happy matrimony."

What would not Frank have given to indulge in a hearty laugh ! the widow had never calculated on the force of ambition—no, although she had called a lord-mayor her brother ! She forgot that Lady Clara was an earl's daughter ; she forgot all, in short, except herself ; for the flourish of sentiment in which her companion had indulged, with its accompaniments of sighs and glances, had caused a strange sensation about the region of her heart.

" Youth and beauty," pursued Mrs. Wilkins : " those are the gilded nets which entangle the fluttering followers of fashion:" the old lady had

- ✓ waxed unusually eloquent ; “ they look not beyond, and forget that a few years will effectually destroy the one, and a fit of the smallpox may as totally obliterate all traces of the other.”

“ I confess,” said Harcourt, “ that to me there has always appeared to be great folly in the care with which ladies usually conceal their real age, and the tact with which they contrive to mislead our sex on that point ; for, surely there is a greater glory in hearing it remarked that Mrs. or Miss So and So *wears well*—it shows that the disposition has kept time in check, and that his ravages are more than usually imperceptible.”

“ A most sensible remark,” said the widow ; “ and well worthy of one who is in most things superior to his years : were such an opinion general, then indeed society would be established on a more rational and respectable footing than it is.”

Rational and respectable society ! How the phrase savoured of “ the bar.” The widow was getting prosy ; and Frank felt that his arrows were beginning once more to fly wide of the mark. He rallied.

“ What signifies it that we have spent a score of years more or less in the world, do we thereby lose the attributes which won for us in our earlier youth the affections of those whose good opinion we value ? Are our hearts to be ruled by time, and chilled by dates ? Are we not to continue free agents ? Am I to look on you—even you, my best friend, with less affection, with less regard now, at this moment, than I should have done ten years ago, because you are by those ten years my superior in wisdom and in experience ? Am I to be the less pitied under your anger to-day than I should have been then, when I venture to tell you what I have kept for so long a period locked up within my

own bosom—imprisoned among the fastnesses of my own heart—when I venture to tell you,” and Frank threw himself at her feet, “that I love you !”

It was the action of an instant, and Harcourt absolutely panted for breath when he remembered that his future fortunes hinged upon the next five minutes, and felt that did he obtain his deserts, he should be kicked out of the house. Suffice it, that he was not ; but after a few short and hurried sentences on each side, as he was about to rise from his knees, Miss Parsons entered the room ; it was too late for him to regain his chair ; her eye, dilated far beyond its usual circumference, rested full upon him, and she stood motionless at the door.

“I really cannot find this truant reel of cotton, my dear madam,” said Frank, with the most composed and unabashable impudence, as he affected to search the carpet very carefully ; “but leave your work for to-day, and to-morrow I will bring you a supply from Wilks’s.”

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT a strange thing is marriage ! How it loosens all the links of kindred, to rivet the one fetter, which once forged, death only, or—where character and money are alike objects of indifference—*divorce*, can ever disunite. The bride quits the home of her father, and the arms of her mother, for those of a comparative stranger ; all her early

habits, her early associations, are overthrown at once—she becomes as it were a new being: her hopes, her duties, and her pursuits, are changed as if by enchantment—she stands in a new world.

Nothing could be more lovely than the scene which met the eye of Lady Clara Nichols from the window of her dressing-room, lighted up as every object then was by a bright noonday sun: immediately beneath her, a flower-garden of excelling beauty threw up a delicious perfume, and glittered beneath the sunbeams in ten thousand glowing tints; while in the distance the short velvet grass of the finely-undulating park spread away in beautiful patches of light and shade, as the noble clusters of timber threw back the sunshine, or the open stretches of turf basked in its genial warmth; groups of deer couched under the tall trees, and the graceful fawns frolicked beneath the branches, or fled in mimic fear, only to return with a light speed which seemed to outstrip the wind. The voice of the blackbird was loud amid the boughs; and the regal peacock led forth his mates, with his gemmed feathers glistening gorgeously in the sunshine. But it was to the lake that the eye of Lady Clara turned, and on which it rested the most complacently—how could it be otherwise? Riding on the bright wave, like some fairy bark summoned there by the wand of an enchanter, she discovered the most ethereal-looking vessel which ever bore the form of beauty over the waters: its sails were of azure silk, looped with flowers; and near it rode another boat filled with musicians, whose distant melody came sweetly and almost sadly to her ear. She could not but confess to herself that Nichols deserved to be loved better than he was—she could not but feel that a once lightly-expressed wish, ut-

tered in the idleness of a moment of pleasure, had been treasured, and was now gratified. She was about to turn from the window, when she was arrested by an exclamation from Mademoiselle Imogene; who, marvelling what could have withdrawn the attention of her lady from *la robe du monde la mieux organisée*, had just taken a peep over her shoulder to acquaint herself with the interesting fact.

"Ah! que c'est charmant! que c'est délicieux! ah, miladi, que milor—pardonnez; que Monsieur Nicolles a des idées célestes! mais c'est magnifique! ce vaisseau blanc-doré, et ces voiles de bleu celeste, bandées de roses—la jolie chose! même faire naufrage d'un tel vaisseau seroit jouissance—qu'il mérite d'avoir, miladi pour épouse, ce Monsieur-là!"

Lady Clara scarcely agreed with her; nevertheless the fairy bark was beautiful and well-fancied: and without going to the length of mademoiselle's admiration, which could find enjoyment even in being wrecked in such a vessel, she felt that there would be pleasure and novelty in finding herself on board of it; and accordingly she hastened her toilette, and having thrown a cachemire over "the best organized dress in the world," she left her apartment.

Nichols was ingenious in similar little elegant conceits: and Lady Clara was forced to confess to herself, that ostentation had no part in his profusion, for she alone witnessed and shared them: yet no expense was spared, no trouble or difficulty was considered; every day produced its novelty and its enjoyment; and Lady Clara even began to doubt whether high birth, with all its privileges and immunities, could have been more prolific of positive delights; but then, she conceded this point in the solitude of a well-appointed country-place, in the first

weeks of her marriage, ere for Nichols himself the gilt of delusion was yet worn away from the gingerbread of novelty: while he yet remembered that he had won an earl's daughter to his hearth and home, and had not suffered from the contact of high-born and exacting society; and while she was still unwearied by the splendour of which she had become the mistress. No shade of the roturier was visible to shock her refined and tenacious tastes: even Mademoiselle Imogine, the most exclusive of soubrettes, had no cause of complaint; she was lodged en ange, and Monsieur Parfait was the best bred as well as the best paid of valets: all was couleur de rose with the pretty and fantastic waiting-maid, accablée as she had been at the marriage bourgeois of her lady, "un homme du peuple—marchand même," as she had contemptuously phrased it a few months previously; now, as she confessed to Monsieur Parfait, while sipping their maresquino in a garden parlour, "Miladi s'étoit très ménagée, car elle n'étoit plus si jeune—et pour beauté!" and the little bright-eyed soubrette smoothed down her pink silk apron, and shook back her ringlets; "il ne valoit pas la peine d'en parler!" A fact in which the polished and perfumed valet tacitly acquiesced.

Strange inconsistency of human nature, that we are for ever sighing for some apparently unattainable object, and neglecting to appreciate the enjoyments which we actually possess! For ever on the quiver of hope and anticipation, deadening by the irritation of fantastic and futile desires, the positive good which is ours, and which is so well worthy of welcome. Are we haughty in station, we pant for wealth; for the very elevation of our position entails a thousand factitious necessities which gall us by their pertinacity, and sting us by their existence. Are we wealthy, we sigh to "gild the refined gold"

by some less negative dignity; we long to be enrolled among the mighty ones of the land, and our diamonds are dimmed by the consciousness that the brow which bears them is ignoble. We pride ourselves on our mental attributes: and yet what is the game of life?—like idle urchins inflating soap bubbles, we are individually discontented if our neighbour sends a larger bubble than our own on its aerial voyage, though we know that each will burst and vanish in its turn, the one as contemptible and worthless as the other.

To the world's eye Nichols and his bride possessed every attribute of happiness; he had bought connexion with his gold: she had purchased wealth with her title; and yet neither was satisfied—like children who, grasping a glow-worm, weep to discover that the insect they have clutched is both ugly and insignificant, they already began to feel that prospect had proved more delicious than possession. Strange clouds flitted over the brow of the gentleman, and the lip of the lady resumed its cold and scornful expression. Be it not supposed, however, that this change was the work of an hour; gradually, but surely, the conviction came, that disappointment lurked amid the roses of success; that there was a void yet unfilled; a yearning yet unsatisfied. Nichols might have filled up the heart-chasm with a peerage; but Lady Clara had lost caste; for her there was no remedy. Splendour and affluence encompassed them: the right honourable relatives of the bride found all their brightest anticipations amply realized; the earl smiled patronage and encouragement on his son-in-law when he paid his first visit to — Park; and Lord Ashburnham borrowed his horses to lame in the hunting-field, and to display in the ring; while Nichols, delighted with the kind consideration of his noble

connexions, repaid them every attention with coin as sterling as they could wish.

It is a pitiable reflection, that the aristocracy should ever be reduced to the necessity of pandering to the ambition of the herd! That the peer should be condemned to be civil to the plebeian, because his coronet requires regilding, and he possesses not wherewithal to renew the lustre of the toy! If nobility necessarily entailed wealth, how much more lordly would be the mighty ones of the land! Now, alas! they are jostled on the trottoir, and elbowed in the crowd, even like their fellow-men—they are considered as mere mortals, and treated accordingly. This is surely not as it should be! however, so it is, and so Joseph Nichols found it; ay, so very a mortal did his titled father-in-law prove, that he borrowed his money, and made use of him like a commoner. For a time this was delightful; to have his name coupled with that of the Earl of Somerville was a sufficient recompense for any little effort or temporary inconvenience which might accrue to the bridegroom; but after awhile the gilding wore away from the fretwork of his vanity, and he began to feel that the importunities of even a peer of the realm may be at times inconvenient and unreasonable: Nichols made this very impertinent discovery just at the termination of his "honeymoon;" when after a silent, and, on the part of his bride, sulky breakfast, he was affectionately requested to settle a gambling debt for Lord Ashburnham, in order that the affair should not transpire beyond "the family!" It is somewhat unreasonable to expect a man to pay five hundred per cent. even for being son-in-law to an earl. Nichols had a horror ofecal-mines; in fact, like a bitten man, he dreaded a mad dog, and detested all mention of commerce, but he could not in common courtesy

refuse to advance a few thousands on the speculation of Lord Somerville,—he had no passion for gaming, but he would not incur the risk of being voted miserly or unsociable by the volatile Ashburnham; and if he paid somewhat dearly for his initiation into the mysteries of high play, surely it was pleasant to reflect that the money remained, to use the phrase of the earl, “so fortunately in the family,” when he saw it transferred from his own pocket to that of his bride’s brother! He was naturally of domestic habits, and an affectionate disposition; and if he found that his home was deserted for watering-places and assemblies; and his endearments repaid by coldness and contempt, it was, nevertheless, very consolatory to reflect, that his comfort was destroyed, and his affection slighted by a woman of quality! He had stepped aside from the common highway of plebeian existence, and if the path which he had chosen was somewhat thorny, still he could not reasonably anticipate that circumstances would be *totus teres atque rotundus*, and that there would be no one cloud on the horizon of his success.

His town-house, his equipages, and his stud were all complete of their kind; he had every thing which he could desire, except that insignificant item in the sum total of human existence termed—happiness! Everywhere he met with consideration and respect, save in his own house; by every one he was received with kindness and listened to with attention, save by his patrician bride; but she had no interest in striving to gain the good opinion of Mr. Nichols,—she had married him! She sneered at his sentiment and yawned over his attentions: closeted herself in her *boudoir* with Lady Blacksley, and suffered him to sit down at his spacious and well-appointed table to a desolate and solitary dinner; talked, when they were together, of individuals to whom he was

unknown, and refused to admit to her presence any of his former associates: there was, however, one exception to this sweeping sentence of banishment, and that one was in favour of Frank Harcourt; the handsome, the heartless Frank Harcourt: the young barrister was ever welcome, whether Lady Clara were in the library with her lord, or in her boudoir with the countess. He was her ladyship's human poodle; her fetcher and carrier of polite gossip and well-bred scandal: the best judge of a bonnet, and the best critic of a debutante in the whole circle of her acquaintance; volatile, well-looking, and assiduous, with a dash of romance and sentiment quite refreshing: no wonder that he was such a favourite with Lady Clara Nichols. There was also a delicious little mystery about Harcourt; no one could tell how he contrived to live; yet contrive it he did, and that too most expensively: little did any of his associates dream of the widow in Baker-street!

The public prints duly announced the arrival of the new married couple in town; coroneted carriages stopped at their door for an instant to deposite the visiting tickets of their occupants; the brazen knocker echoed beneath the hand of liveried domestics; and a fleet of gondola-like cabs glided mysteriously along, defying identification, while the little Flibbertigibbet grooms sprang from behind them, to leave the "style and title" of their masters in the hands of the portly and pompous porter. — street was all alive with the vehicles of Lady Clara's visitors: some of her friends laughed, some sneered, and all speculated on the opening career of the nouveau ménage. Some wondered at the degeneracy of the lady's taste, but all were agreed on the deficiency of Mr. Nichols's judgment. He might have done so much better with his money!

Meanwhile Lady Clara sat wrapped in her cache-

mire in her morning-room, surrounded by almost oriental luxury ; breathing the sweetest perfumes, and looking on the most gorgeous objects of taste, fashion, and virtù. Beside her was Mr. Frank Harcourt, near her was Lady Blacksley : and farther in the shadow of the apartment, half joining in the conversation, and half engaged with a morning paper, lounged the host himself, the fortunate Joseph Nichols, the husband of Lady Clara.

"And so things remain much as I left them?" said the bride ; "knaves and fools supply the population, and fashion and caprice rule the hour ; heigho ! something novel would be impayable."

"Nay, Clara, you at least are unreasonable in the wish," observed the countess, as she withdrew a fine exotic from a vase, and placed it in her bosom : "you, who have supplied half London with a topic of conversation ; surely you should be satisfied for a time."

"And are half London inclined to pity or to blame, may I inquire?" asked the lady, in a tone of subdued scorn.

"I should consider that there was slender foundation in your ladyship's case for either the one feeling or the other," coldly remarked Nichols, without looking up.

"Mr. Nichols always logically refers effects to causes," said Lady Clara, glancing at Harcourt ; "he will never understand that with *certain* portions of town society, very wonderful effects may be produced from very insignificant causes,—acorns produce oaks ; but really talking to no purpose is a great fatigue."

Something which sounded like a sigh came from the farther extremity of the apartment, but no one appeared to remark it.

"Pity it is," said Harcourt, "that while it is so

delightful to listen to Lady Clara Nichols, she should be a sufferer from the exertion: talking well is certainly a great talent, and your ladyship's family are peculiarly gifted in that way."

Lady Clara smiled, and so did the countess; for Frank terminated his speech by a polite bow to the latter lady.

"Papa certainly speaks well," acquiesced the bride. Oh! that Lady Clara could have persuaded the members of the Upper House of the fact; what fits of coughing and paroxysms of yawning they would have been spared!

"Have you heard, Clara," said the countess, "that Mr. Lovell is about to marry an heiress? roturiere, I believe, but immensely rich; the affair is declared, among those who are in the secret, to be certain; but as it is not yet made public, of course Lovell can draw back in the event of repentance anticipating matrimony."

"And why should he repent?" asked Lady Clara, with a heightened colour; "Lionel Lovell is a very sensible man,—he knows well what he is about; with his connexions money was the only desideratum, and money of course he looked for."

"Surely money was not the *only* requisite," interposed Nichols; "Mr. Lovell is much to pity if he looked not beyond his bride's dowry for happiness."

"More commonplace!" said Lady Clara, contemptuously; "really, Mr. Nichols, you are infinitely too naïf for London in the nineteenth century; I could almost suspect you of believing that Lovell requires a grande passion to make a well-appointed establishment acceptable or desirable. No, no, Lionel Lovell is above such child's play; he is a man of the world—un homme de convenances—born and bred a gentleman; initiated into all the myste-

ries of good society, and quite aware of the impossibility of retaining a prominent station in the world without that necessary concomitant—money. For what are we all panting, speculating, and sighing? money, still money. Trace ten thousand striking and astounding occurrences to their source, and you will find that they originated in the want of, or the desire to possess, this one universal panacea for all evils. It is to obtain money that the highborn bend their haughty necks, and look down from their altitude; for this that the merchant sends forth his ventures to distant countries; for this—but pshaw! I am becoming oratorical.”

There was a pause at the termination of Lady Clara's harangue; even Harcourt felt ill at ease; and to break in upon a silence which was irksome, he rose to depart. The ladies bade him good-morning with most encouraging smiles, and Nichols, as he wrung his hand, desired him thenceforward to consider that house as his own; a request in which, for the first time, the wishes of Lady Clara were the echo of those of her husband.

Frank had scarcely passed the portal when a smile rose to his lips. Nichols was fairly caught! caged! pecking the wires already! A modern writer says, that “there is something very diverting in the misfortunes of our friends.”* We most devoutly hope not; or the world is even less amiable than we have had occasion to believe; certain nevertheless it is, that Frank, proud in the idea of his own superior sagacity, could not help thinking how very differently the widow would combine her phrases when she became Mrs. Harcourt. “At all events,” so he concluded his reverie, “if I can keep

* Rochefoucault had previously expressed the same sentiment, although somewhat modified: “Les malheurs de nos amis ne nous déplaisent jamais.”

the fair bride in good-humour by a few honeyed sentences, I owe it to poor Nichols to do so : and as for my own cara, if she venture to talk treason, and hint at rebellion, I shall find a safe and quiet seclusion for her in the country, where she may preach *ad libitum* to Miss Parsons and the pugs !”

CHAPTER VII.

It is good for us sometimes to look on death, for the world is prone to drive such memories from our minds : we live amid scenes of business and pleasure, wholly absorbed by each in turn ; and if we at times give a thought to the future, it is too often engendered by the mere force of habit and association. The sight of death recalls us at once to a sense of our mortality—we feel the nothingness of the gilded baubles which we are toiling to grasp—the conviction is forced upon us that we are exhausting our energies upon ephemera unworthy of a moment's consideration, and our spirit recoils upon itself, and is humbled to the centre.

What a fearful mystery is death ! with its rigidity, its inanity, and its decay. What a subject of contemplation for the reflective—what a source of speculation to the inquiring—the omega of all earthly hopes, aspirations, and affections—the alpha of eternity ! To the Christian, death is the welcome portal of another world ; to the unbeliever, it is but the harbinger of corruption, the commencement of oblivion, the messenger of destruction, the mingling of dust with dust.

There is a fearful solemnity in the house of death : the closed windows, the muffled footfalls,

the whispered sentences, all the concomitants of a sick room, augmented tenfold when their observance is no longer requisite ; when the shut eye, the deafened ear, and the departed spirit, are beyond the reach of human interference ; all these things combine to throw over the image of dissolution a new and gratuitous gloom : we shudder and sicken at the very atmosphere of the house of mourning, and a thousand thoughts and images of despondency and sadness crowd darkly across the fancy.

The meeting between Agnes and Eustace was a melancholy one on the day which was to see the remains of Mrs. Sydenham consigned to the grave : both were in deep mourning, and each alike dreaded to speak on the subject which alone occupied their thoughts.

Eustace followed in the train of death ; humbly, and with a stricken heart ; and when he had seen the earth heaped upon the coffin, he returned to soothe the afflicted mourner who was now dependent on him for solace and support.

Agnes received him with tears of gratitude and trust : Eustace thought that he had never seen her look more beautiful ; and as he stood in the narrow room with her hand in his, he felt that the task which yet remained for him to accomplish—that of seeking a new home for Agnes among strangers—would be the most difficult of all. Yet that task must nevertheless be fulfilled, and he resolved that even on the morrow he would deliver the fateful letter on which his future happiness must hinge.

“But we will not talk of this to-night, Agnes,” he said, in reply to her tearful reference to the unwelcome subject ; “we will forget that any uncertainty of your welfare exists ; before we part I have many things to say to you, more, indeed, than it may interest you to hear ; and yet, Agnes, short as

has been our period of acquaintance, we have been known to each other, unlike the children of pleasure, in sorrow and in suffering; our feelings have outgrown time; friendship was enjoined between us by one who can never again breathe her wishes to either of us,—and we are, we must be, friends; there should not be a shadow of deception on the part of the one or the other; on yours I feel, I know that there is none; but on mine—”

Agnes raised her large dark eyes anxiously to his, pressed back the raven braids from her brow, and sat with parted lips and beating heart awaiting the conclusion of his remark.

“Fear me not, nevertheless, Miss Davenel,” he continued, somewhat proudly, as he observed her extreme emotion; “I may have erred in judgment, but I have never failed in principle; I am poor, but I am proud; that poverty and that pride have led me to seem other than I am, but have never taught me to blush at my identity.”

“I believe you from my soul,” faltered Agnes.

“You do me no more than justice, yet I thank you deeply,” said Eustace, as he pressed to his lips the small hand which she extended to him; “in all save in name I am that which you have ever thought me; but, Agnes, a lingering feeling of reverence for the name of my father, has prompted me to shun all chance of hearing it coupled with poverty. Call me in future by the name of Smithson; but think of me, if indeed I may indulge so fond a hope, by that of Eustace.”

“It already seems familiar to my fancy,” murmured Agnes. “And is this all? and yet to you I doubt not that it is enough to have seemed even for an hour that which you were not in truth. Do you desire me to think of you? Alas! of whom or of what save of *you* am I to think? She is gone

whom I loved so tenderly ; the world is to me a wilderness, and you are the one green spot on which my bewildered soul rests, and where alone it can linger without trembling. Yes, Mr. Eustace—for I love to speak to you as one who knows you better than does that fearful world—my thoughts will ever turn to you as to their home, let me dwell where I may."

How could Eustace reply to such an avowal ? Had he trusted himself with words, they must have been those of tenderness and passion ; but he shrank from forcing at such a moment upon the heart of Agnes his own selfish wishes. Her artlessness, her innocence, her utter reliance on him, were so many bonds serving to fetter every tone or look which might tend to disturb the growing calm of her spirit ; and he felt, moreover, that it were an insult to talk to her of love ere the grave had scarcely closed over her last relative.

They conversed long together ; and he told her of the home of his boyhood, and the virtues of his parents, while she sat with her soft eyes suffused in tears, a silent listener : then he dwelt on his early struggles to exist, when he found himself a stranger and alone in the vast metropolis, and the large drops fell upon her cheek ; he pursued the tale, and she listened eagerly as he spoke of the kind and gentle girl who had first opened for him the narrow path which led to competence ; had the tear not already fallen, the sympathizing flash in her dark eye would have absorbed it at that moment. Eustace could have folded her to his heart as he heard her breath come quick and short, and remarked the clasping of her hands ; at length he carried on his narrative to the day when he first beheld herself, and then in his turn Eustace breathed thickly and with difficulty, and paused.

"And you saved me from insult, and from that fearful man!" murmured Agnes, veiling her eyes with her hand. "I shall never forget him; and you led me home to the arms of—"

"Yes, Agnes, it was a proud day for me," interposed Eustace, eager to interrupt the course of her ideas, which had again wandered to Mrs. Sydenham, "and a happy one; for on that day I beheld you for the first time, and thus gained a friend—a sister. Since that day nothing like despondency has weighed down my spirit; I have a resting-place for my thoughts, a motive for exerting my best energies: the hope of proving myself not to be wholly unworthy of the trust with which Providence has favoured me."

"Unworthy!" faltered Agnes, as she looked up at him with a sweet smile, rendered still more beautiful by the tears through which it beamed; "surely, surely that Providence of which you speak never conferred a trust on one more worthy; surely never orphan was blessed with a more valuable, a more kind protector! When I think of the utter destitution, the utter friendlessness in which I should have been left without your support, I could kneel and bless you! and if the prayer of the stricken heart which your comforting has healed may indeed prosper you, then will all earthly happiness be yours."

Agnes paused, and the silent tears fell fast upon her cheek.

"Enough of this, sweet Agnes," said Eustace, in a faltering voice; "we must not dwell on these gloomy images: henceforth I trust that sorrow will be known to you only by name and memory; while for myself it can scarcely exist, so long as I am blessed with your confidence and friendship. The world owes some happiness to each of us, for we have as yet been partakers only of its cares; the

clouds cannot endure for ever on the horizon of our fortunes ; there must be some sunny hours in store, which we have yet to enjoy, and we must not sadden these by dark memories of the sorrows which have preceded them. The beneficent Creator of the universe never made this glorious world to be a scene of continual care and wretchedness ; well is it for those whose trials come early, while they have youth and hope to assist them in the struggle ; it is hard, very hard, when poverty or suffering lay their heavy grasp on the old, who are beyond hope. We have both seen our nearest relatives swept away into the cold grave, but we have the prospect of forming new ties and new friendships, and of living over again those blessed feelings of affection and tenderness that form the halo from which life derives all its brightness."

"I thank you for the lesson," said Agnes, as she rose and placed before Eustace the holy volume on which the hand of Mrs. Sydenham had rested as she expired ; "evening is closing in, and you must soon leave me to the solitary memory of my sorrows,—let it be with a chastened and a humble heart ; and where can we better seek for consolation than in the words of Him who is the Comforter ?"

Eustace obeyed ; and they sat side by side in that humble apartment ; his low, deep voice breathing out the promises of peace and holiness, and her fair head meekly bent in reverence as she listened. And when they closed the book, and Eustace prepared to depart, they separated with a calm smile, for their spirits *were* chastened, and full of a quiet hope which forbade all mention of sorrow ; even though at that moment each remembered that ere they again met the future destiny of Agnes would be decided.

CHAPTER VIII.

"But, my dear Clara, only consider what the world will say," exclaimed Mr. Nichols deprecatingly to his bride, who sat near him with heightened complexion and lowering brow.

"Had I valued the opinion of the world, or heeded its sneers, Mr. Nichols," was the reply, "I should never have been your wife."

"Madam!" gasped the gentleman, who, although he had already frequently detected the grumbling of the thunder in the distance, had never yet prepared himself for the falling of the bolt; "do I understand you? Am I indeed to imagine that the fact of your having given me your hand has exposed you to either blame or contempt?"

"It will require no violent effort of the imagination to comprehend that it has subjected me to both," said the lady, quietly, as she resumed her book.

"Lady Clara—madam!" again faltered the astonished husband, "this is really most extraordinary on your part: I am not conscious of having in any way forfeited my claim to that preference with which you honoured me."

"You are in error, Mr. Nichols," said Lady Clara, with a scornful laugh: "you have—married me! You have taught me that your money is not a compensation for my forfeited position in society: believe me, I feel the chain which drags me down very irksome, even although it be of gold."

"Have I lived to hear this?" exclaimed Nichols, in all the bitterness of disappointed and insulted

feeling ; " here is indeed the curse of wealth. Oh ! Lady Clara, could I only have foreseen this when in my mad infatuation I suffered myself to believe that you loved me ! "

" Not so loud, I entreat, Mr. Nichols," said the lady, affecting a yawn, " I am somewhat nervous to-day, added to which nothing can be so underbred as loud talking ; and, for my sake, you should really sacrifice something. I hate scenes, particularly matrimonial ones, they are fatiguing and unprofitable ; very exhausting to the system, and very destructive to the temper. "

Nichols strode hurriedly across the room ; internally cursing his own blind infatuation and the self-possession of his wife. To be told without circumlocution or ceremony that he had been made a tool of, was almost too much for even his constitutionally good-temper.

" Then, madam, I am to understand that your resolution is irrevocable ? " he said, calmly, after struggling for a while with his emotion.

" As the laws of the Medes and Persians : and to prevent all future misunderstandings, it may be as well to state distinctly at once that all my resolutions are so. "

" There, at least, madam, we sympathize, " said Nichols, somewhat sternly : " and it were indeed well, as you remark, that we should at once understand each other ; I trust that it may yet be possible to reconcile our respective determinations, so that we may indulge them without annoyance to either of us. "

" It is very improbable that they will assimilate or interfere, I should imagine, " said Lady Clara, superciliously ; " for they are likely to lead us in very different directions ; yours will doubtlessly tend eastward, and mine are certain to travel west. "

"Pity that this discovery was not made six months ago!" remarked Nichols, "it would have been decidedly advantageous to each of us: however, it is vain to regret the past; and as my chimeras of domestic happiness are dispelled for ever, we have now only to wear a fair face to the world, and at least strive to seem that which I now learn we never can be."

"We have at least each carried our point," said the lady, looking up once more from her book.

"What your ladyship may have done, it is, I now feel, quite impossible for me to determine," coldly observed her husband; "but for myself, I can assert that my plans and prospects have totally miscarried. Listen to me, Lady Clara Nichols; if indeed I may yet hope to supersede for five minutes your perusal of the very interesting volume which you hold in your hand; listen to me, and I can soon convince you that I at least have failed, as you have somewhat crudely expressed it, to 'carry my point.'"

"A man convinced against his will
Is of the same opinion still,"

declaimed her ladyship as she composedly laid aside her novel, and looked up at her agitated companion with a smile of most imperturbable good breeding; "Ebbene, Mr. Nichols; as in duty bound I listen, to be at once, I doubt not, edified and instructed."

"Your ladyship is apt at quotation; it is the hackneyed resort of bad logicians, the only graceful retreat for baffled and defective argument; unworthy of both of us at such a moment as this. I know not, Lady Clara, I cannot even guess at your feelings, for it is too palpable that we have never understood each other. My own I shall not weary you by attempting to describe; only thus much I hold it as a duty to myself to declare, that when I

received your hand at the altar, the vows which I there uttered came from my heart, and I would, had you permitted me to have done so, have fulfilled them all."

"I am of course to understand, Mr. Nichols," said his wife, with one of her most blighting sneers, "that you married me solely from affection—for love, if you like the phrase better; and that you would have done so equally had I been Miss Clara Smith, or Miss Eliza Browne."

"No, madam, I deny the inference; I desire to claim no merit of which I am unworthy; had you been other than you were, I should never have married you; I should never have allowed myself to bestow a second thought on you; ambition was my besetting sin. And although, when you became my wife, I had taught myself to believe that I loved you, I nevertheless coveted your connexion, when you were individually utterly a matter of indifference to me. Nevertheless, I could have loved you; I did—"

"Flattering and delicate," apostrophized Lady Clara, smoothing her gloves; "et puis?"

"And then, madam, you taught me, calmly and by degrees; for I will give you full credit for the method, the perseverance, and the self-government with which you have undermined my visions of domestic happiness; you taught me, I say, that, not satisfied with my positive means of becoming a respectable and estimable member of society, I had pursued a bright and deceptive dream of splendour and glitter, which, like the frail pictures of the kaleidoscope, fell into confusion the instant I grasped it. You taught me the lesson, and I at once felt it in all its force."

"A pretty image," said Lady Clara; "it really

quite savours of Mrs. Charles Gore,—que y-a-t-il de plus ?”

“Little, madam, very little,” replied Nichols, struggling anew to suppress his agitation; “but I now ask you if I have indeed ‘carried my point?’ The only point which I have carried has been to make myself an object of the world’s supercilious pity, and of your contempt.”

“A very anti-pleasurable reflection certainly; and one by no means calculated to calm the nerves, or improve the *natural*,” said the lady; “but it may be merely ideal on your part, and I would advise you not to dwell upon it. I do this in all consideration and kindness; for a stray idea is as uncomfortable in some heads, as a mouse in one of the pyramids; it is bewildered in the immensity of the void.”

This was too much, even Nichols could not trust his temper beyond it; and accordingly he strode rapidly across the floor, and left the room.

A short, contemptuous, half-smothered laugh followed him as he retreated, but it died away almost convulsively on the lips which had given it utterance. What did Lady Clara promise herself from the line of conduct which she was now pursuing? To what could it tend, save to discomfort, to unhappiness, to alienation even more utter than the present from him whom she had made her husband? We will whisper it in your ear, reader; there was yet a step beyond these—**DIVORCE!**

Let the stricken heart which has quailed beneath the sense of humiliation, and disgrace, and abandonment, which is the concomitant of **DIVORCE**, decide the value of that which Lady Clara now coveted! Even should the divorced wife seek no second helpmeet, what is her fate? The pity of the few, the contempt of the many, the neglect of all. Hers is a living death; her personal loveliness may remain

to win for her the empty, and interested, and speculative flattery of the idler and the voluptuary; but her moral beauty is gone for ever; and those who once feared to offend her purity by a look or a tone, carelessly bandy in her presence the coarse jest and the invidious remark, from which she would once have shrunk as from the plague-spot. Vainly would she resent all this; of herself she is powerless, and she has no one to defend her cause. Who would peril safety or reputation for a divorced wife? Let her live what life she may, however pure, however passionless, the world will yield her no credit; the leprosy of DIVORCE is on her soul, and the crowd dreads its contagion!

Does she marry, how is her case varied save by augmented contumely? Then do matrons shrink from her path lest their innocent daughters suffer from the contact; then do anxious fathers warn from her side their inexperienced sons, lest they be wiled by the fallen syren from the ways of probity and honour. She lives in a state of licensed prostitution; she is legally a wife, she is morally an adultress!

Lady Clara looked not so deeply into these things; but even glancing cursorily at the subject, she yet saw enough to make her pause for a moment on the brink of separation—the world would condemn her,—her haughty spirit revolted for an instant, but in the next she remembered that it had already blamed her, when she contracted that very marriage which she was now so anxious to annul. Many of the associates of her youth would look coldly on her; but were they not partially alienated already? Her father! that should have been an all-sufficient impediment; but she could not forget that had that father looked upon the step which she meditated as too disgraceful and dishonouring ever

to be contemplated by *his* daughter, there existed not the necessity for such arrangements as had emanated from her own family, in the event of such an occurrence. Her aunt too, the Countess of Blacksley, had not she talked of the thing as of very probable occurrence? as a feasible finale to a roturier marriage? Ergo, the prospect was not one of so very appalling a nature. Then Lady Clara reversed the picture: she persuaded herself that she had hitherto only looked on the black side; and she began to talk to herself of dear liberty, freedom from the whims of both parent and husband, a liberal establishment, a handsome income, an attractive equipage, and even—for we are bound to confess that there were moments when the speculative fancies of Lady Clara ran away with her judgment for a time—even of the silvery tones and bright eyes of Frank Harcourt! Not that she would have sacrificed to her feelings for the young barrister one tittle of her glitter or her gauds; but he was the last man whom she fancied she had loved; his was the last form which had flitted across the mental mirror of her imagination.

It has been beautifully said by an Italian writer,* “*Il cuore incostante rassomiglia allo specchio, che riceve ogni impressione, ma che non ne ritiene nessuna.*” The heart of Lady Clara was only in so far removed from “*il cuore incostante*” here described, that although many images glided over its surface, as each in its turn faded, that of Frank returned to fill up the blank; had Lady Clara been otherwise constituted than she was, her sentiment for him would have assuredly deepened into affection; as it was, however, an inherent love of coquetry fur-

* Isabella Andreini.

nished its foundation, and flattered vanity supplied the superstructure.

All her ambition gratified, all her dreams of profusion realized and imbodyed, Lady Clara had leisure, as she sat among her ten thousand costly baubles, to believe that they had been too dearly purchased ; all her friends, which phrase simply implies the crowd who exchanged bows, smiles, and visiting tickets with her family, had each and all looked at, and handled, and expatiated on those baubles : had criticised, and wondered, and forgotten ; or at least, which to the vanity of Lady Clara was infinitely more disagreeable, affected to forget. And now, what remained ? She was one who never in all her visions had contemplated content as desirable. Content ! what was content ? the plebeian, groveling, mean spirited attribute of a stagnant mind ! Lady Clara loathed stagnation of all sorts—

“ Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.”

She possessed what is often indulgently called by the world “ an active imagination ;” but which those who are individually annoyed, rendered uncomfortable, and distressed by its operations, less courteously denominate, an ungracious, irritable, restless temper. Alas ! for the unhappy wight who selects one of these beings of active imagination to head his table, and to sit at his hearth—to be the cayenne of his domestic curry—the shooting-star of his social horizon ! Though he may flatter himself that the quietude and indolence of his own disposition will render him invulnerable, yet will he not escape—for the “ active imagination” will discover the heel of Achilles even here. Lady Clara had done so : the temper of Nichols was unexceptionable—his *tendon Achilles* was a desire to stand well in the world’s

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opinion—and she felt that there he was indeed vulnerable.

The present argument was her matrimonial coup d'essai ; it had grown out of an expressed determination to indulge some whim, which, trifling as its gratification must have proved, would nevertheless have borne an ill aspect with the world. Gently and mildly he expostulated ; she only became more resolute—we have seen the result.

CHAPTER IX.

EUSTACE had fulfilled his mission—and he sat gloomily in his humble apartment, lost in a deep and painful reverie : his countenance assuredly bore not the traces of success ; and yet he had succeeded. A home now awaited Agnes, which, if not one of positive splendour, was nevertheless, compared with that which she was about to quit for ever, one of luxury and elegance. Eustace sighed as he remembered the powdered menials, and the air of expense and profusion which he had seen there, for what had he to offer to Agnes in return for her sacrifice of these ? But there was another reflection, which pained him even more than this. He was authorized to promise to the orphan a home beneath the roof of her last relative, and a place at her hearth ; but the promise had been rung from her reluctantly and ungraciously, and had been accompanied by many coarse and heartless remarks reflecting on her dead parents. Was this a congenial home for the gentle Agnes ? Alas ! Eustace keenly felt that it was not. For the idol of his heart to

degenerate into a slighted and soul-subdued dependant, stung him to the quick: young as she was, lovely as she was, her lot in this world had been hitherto all sorrow, but this would be the keenest suffering of all. There was yet a hope that the gentleness and beauty of the orphan might soften down the asperities of her protectress, but it was a faint one; for the dictatorial and self-centred nature of the individual whom he had just quitted, seemed not like one susceptible of the charms of gentleness and beauty. Eustace was irresolute how to act; whether at once to explain candidly to Agnes the nature of the protection which she was to expect, or merely to inform her of the simple fact that her relative consented to receive her, without comment or detail: on either side there were objections; in narrating fully and circumstantially to the orphan the conversation and manner of his new acquaintance, there was the risk of prejudicing her mind against a home, which, cold as was the promise that it held out of comfort or consideration, was nevertheless her only eligible abiding-place, at least for a time. On the other hand, to leave her in total ignorance of the heartless and unfeeling reception which awaited her, seemed even less politic—to buoy up her young and unsuspecting spirit with hopes and inferences never likely to be realized—to speak to her the words of congratulation, while his heart gainsaid them, appeared to Eustace to be the very refinement of false delicacy and cruelty; he knew not how to decide; and consequently he resolved to trust to chance when they met, for that line of conduct which at the moment should appear to him the most likely to conduce to the comfort of Agnes.

Perhaps Eustace was right,—chance often operates more powerfully on our human destinies than

the most deliberate resolutions : for our own part—but, reader, you probably know nothing about *us*, and consequently are not at all likely to take any interest in knowing how *we* act on occasions of difficulty ; therefore we will spare you the explanation.

Once more Eustace sat beside the orphan ; once more he met her calm and confiding smile ; but this day his heart beat more quickly than it had ever previously done, as he listened to her artless expressions of gratitude and trust. Since he stood with her beside the bed of death, he had been in the world's throng ; he had heard the voice of calculating and callous selfishness ; he had seen the busy crowd press forward on their million errands of business and of pleasure ; and he was awakened to the consciousness that the feeling for Agnes which in the hour of suffering he had struggled to subdue, had deepened with the effort. The conviction that it was so, embarrassed the words of Eustace, and fettered his ideas, while insensibly the manner of Agnes betrayed that she had imbibed the infection. But if the lips of Mortimer were less eloquent than their wont, there was a tenderness in his earnest look, beneath which the eyes of the orphan fell, and her cheek crimsoned. Could she be woman, and fail to interpret the expression of that gaze ?

“Agnes,” at length he said, “we are about to part ; to leave our future intercourse abridged and restricted, if not wholly terminated by one who will shortly have almost a parent's right to control your actions :—this consideration alone, to me painful, maddening as it is, can induce you to forgive me, when I mingle with prayers for your happiness some aspirations for my own—Agnes, dear Agnes, need I tell you that on you depends that happiness ? —nay, turn not away with that look of reproachful

sorrow,—I have not forgotten what is due to your pure and pious grief, but I remember also that this may be the last time that I may sit beside you, and look upon you, unrestrained by the gaze of strangers,—am I then presumptuous in thus—”

“Presumptuous!” echoed the orphan with proud humility; “is it, can it be presumption in Mr. Eustace to talk kindly to a beggar—to an outcast—to the poor girl who turns to him alone for protection, for solace—the object of her eternal gratitude, of her—”

“Oh! talk not, I beseech you, of gratitude,” exclaimed Eustace; “it is a word which should be forgotten by both of us:—and now tell me, sweet Agnes,”—and he clasped in his own the small hand of the orphan; “is this cold gratitude indeed all which your heart will grant in exchange for the most respectful, the most absorbing love? a love which it has cost me a mighty effort to subdue since I first beheld you,—my thought by day, my dream by night, the solace of my labours, the companion of my solitude. Agnes, you know not, you cannot guess how I have loved you! Alone in the wilderness of the world, without a resting-place for my affections, like the desert bird which knows not where to fold its wing, the sense of utter isolation weighed heavily at my heart,—I saw you, Agnes, young, and beautiful, and innocent; is it then wonderful that I clung to your image with the tenacity of a devotee to the shrine of his madonna? with such tenacity, that if indeed you spurn my affection, I care not what fate existence has yet in store for me.”

“What am I to say?” murmured Agnes, as she looked up at him through her tears; “my dear grandmother has told me a heavy tale of caution which I never shall forget;—she feared even you,

all kind and pitying as you were;—but nevertheless,”—she paused, and a burning blush rose to her brow,—“could she look down upon us now, I think that she would chide me for all farther fear,—indeed, I trust she would, for I feel that I have it not.”

“My own sweet Agnes!” whispered Eustace, as he wound his arm about her, and looked long and ardently upon her crimsoned brow; “and has no gentler feeling grown in your pure bosom to replace that caution? Speak, love—only one word, and then—”

“Then will you ask for more?” interposed the orphan, with a momentary effort at cheerfulness; “but I will not trust myself with words—to-morrow, perhaps—”

“Nay, not to-morrow,” said Eustace, gently detaining her in the seat from which she strove to rise; “tell me not of to-morrow—why should we cheat ourselves of one long day of happiness? it has been such a stranger to my heart that I have grown a niggard of it, and will not forego it, no, not one hour!—come, come, smile, even if you will not bless me with words—you *do* smile, Agnes, you *do*—and I *am* blessed!”

“Surely it is sweet to be so loved!” murmured the orphan, as Eustace strained her passionately to his heart.

“It is! it is!” exclaimed Mortimer; “earth holds no joy so great,—and to be loved by Agnes Davenel—”

“Is to gain nothing save a devoted and a grateful heart,” whispered the fair girl; “for, alas! I am beggared in all beside.”

“Agnes, my beautiful! my best! I envy not the king his crown, nor the peer his coronet—I would not exchange the clasp of this little hand to clutch a sceptre. Beggared, say you? wealth can but pur-

chase happiness—we have it not to buy, it is ours; true, we must strive with the world's wants; and why not? I am young and strong, and I shall have you beside me: your dark eyes shedding light upon my task, and your soft voice gladdening it with music! You will be my inspiration, Agnes; my attendant genius,—a thousand new and beautiful imaginings will grow out of my love for you—a thousand energies spring from my sense of the precious trust confided to me;—man knows not that which he can achieve until the knowledge is wrung from him by emergency,—he guesses not how deeply he can feel until he sees the beloved one clinging to him for protection and support. Agnes—”

“Nay, calm yourself, I beseech you,” said Agnes, timidly; “I cannot endure this burst of passion—I tremble under your glance—Eustace, beloved Eustace.”

“I am calm, love; calm as a chidden child,” murmured Mortimer, struggling at composure; “that tone, those words, fall like oil on the waves of my emotion,—look you,” and he wreathed his fingers amid the dark and clustering ringlets which fell upon her brow—“am I not calm?”

“Trifler!” smiled Agnes, as she swept away the rich locks from his hand, and smiled to learn the extent of her power, “talk you to me of calmness while your lips quiver thus?”

“I will calm even those;” exclaimed Eustace, as he pressed them to her brow and to her cheek with all the fervour of passion: “you shall not chide me, Agnes,” he continued, as she struggled to elude his clasp,—“are you not my own? my love—my wife?—have I not earned that dear embrace by long and deep affection? have I not shared your sorrows? and may I not claim my reward?”

"Eustace"—said the orphan, reproachfully, as she glanced down upon her mourning-garments:—

"I feel, I know all that you would say," replied Mortimer, passionately; "but I feel also that to-morrow I resign you for a time to another and a less devoted protector: but for a time only, Agnes, until I shall have won wherewithal to offer you a home." A shade gathered on his brow, and the stifled sigh of the orphan deepened it; "we may be severed for months—years." He paused, and then added bitterly, "or perchance, for ever! Agnes, in the paths which you are about to tread, there will not be one solitary object to remind you of Mortimer Eustace and poverty; the light-hearted flatterer, the idle man of fashion will be at your side, paying homage to your beauty—the glare and glitter of wealth will be lavished upon you—you will live a charmed life—you will forget me." And overcome by the creations of his own fancy, Eustace cast himself upon the sofa, and buried his face in his hands.

Agnes rose from her seat, and stood beside him. "Eustace," she said, as she endeavoured to possess herself of one of those spread hands, "dear Eustace,—will you not speak to me?" and she sank on her knees beside him, still retaining her clasp; "my best, my only friend—my affianced husband!"

Mortimer heard the appeal: he glanced down on her as she knelt before him with her sweet lips wreathed into a smile of anxious and timid affection, and her large deep eyes fixed on his, while the silent tear of wounded feeling rested on her cheek as if afraid to fall: "Do you indeed doubt me?"

"Sooner would I doubt my own soul!" exclaimed Mortimer, as she buried her blushing face upon his shoulder. "Perish such apostacy!"

"And will you never sin thus again?" asked Agnes, as she glanced fondly at him.

"Never, so help me Heaven, mine own sweet Agnes!" and Eustace believed, as he uttered the apostrophe, that he should indeed never doubt nor fear again.

She was beside him—her hand in his—they had not yet parted.

CHAPTER X.

"AND so you really and seriously believed me to be capable of loving Mr. Nichols?" said Lady Clara, in a low tone, to Harcourt, as she sat screened by the crimson curtain of her opera-box, which was also tenanted, on this particular occasion, by the deaf old Marchioness of Farrington, and the drowsy Lord-Lancaster, to each of whom Pasta warbled in vain, for the one could not, and the other would not hear; "You, who should have known me better."

Frank laughed: "You married him—"

"Raison de plus contre l'amour!" and Lady Clara flushed slightly; "no woman in the nineteenth century marries the man she loves: impediments rise as thick as motes where the heart is at all a party in the business—poverty not the least."

"Alas!" and Frank affected to sigh as their eyes met: "is it to me that Lady Clara Ashburnham (pardon me, *Nichols*, I should have said), is it to me that she utters so trite a truth?—to me?"

"And wherefore not?" asked the lady, with assumed carelessness, but with a slight tremulousness of tone: "I warn you in all friendship, lest you should ever—"

"Lest I should ever!" echoed Frank, with a peculiar emphasis; "is this fair? is this kind from you?"

"I know not why you should consider it otherwise;" and Lady Clara found a sudden charm in her opera-glass, and looked long and earnestly at the stage, as though she anticipated Harcourt's reply. She was not disappointed; it was uttered in a whisper, but it brought the blood to her brow and bosom; and though she strove to frown, Frank was nothing daunted by the reception of his sally. "How provokingly handsome he looks!" was her mental ejaculation: "I should not suffer such decided adulation *now*—and yet, why not? I am married;" and she smoothed her brow again into forgiveness.

"Do you see that pretty woman in the box of the French ambassadress?" she asked, merely to terminate a subject which she felt had gone quite as far as it must, and much farther than it should.

"I know but one pretty woman in London: I see but one. That tall, black-eyed Spaniard to whom you allude is Godfrey Esham's bride. And now I have answered your inquiry, you must reply to mine. You say that I should have known you better than to suppose you ever could have loved — I will not name him, for he is *my* friend, and *your* husband, and at this moment I might be tempted to couple his name with—"

"Hush!" whispered Lady Clara, laying the tips of her fingers on his arm; "for heaven's sake, be more cautious: do you not see that Lancaster is just waking from his doze?"

"Pshaw! do not trifle with me: I am in no mood for trifling."

The lady bit her lip; but Frank felt his advantage, and resolved to keep it: it was too late to

chide; she should have chidden long ago, if she really wished to terminate his gallantries. Harcourt knew precisely how far married women should go in permitting the whispers of their bachelor acquaintance: he knew also that he was quite safe, and it was pleasant and flattering to his self-love to be *l'ami de la maison* with a peer's daughter. To be sure, it was not altogether fair to his friend Nichols, not-altogether honourable, but such things occur every day; and, after all, *he* was not the person to blame!

Delicious sophistry! pleasant honey of self-delusion with which to sweeten the keen and sharp edge of conscience, cloying and impeding it for a time, and ultimately stifling it altogether!

"Perhaps you will at least condescend to inform me where he is to-night," pursued Frank, after a pause; purposely avoiding all mention of the name of Nichols, while he knew that she could not misunderstand to whom he alluded; thus endeavouring to establish that species of covert colloquy of all others the most indiscreet in the relative situation of the parties.

"*Il importe peu!*" was the reply; "prosing with papa, or gaming with Ashburnham; or perhaps feasting with some of his city connexions: I have not seen him to-day."

Frank fixed his eyes steadily on her: "And yesterday?"

Lady Clara started: "Yesterday,—let me remember,—yes, I did see him yesterday."

A peculiar smile flitted over the face of Harcourt; and the words "Poor Nichols!" escaped him, as if involuntarily.

It was an invidious ejaculation, and one which it was difficult to resent; therefore Lady Clara did not attempt to resent it: she affected preoccupation,

and lifted the ear-trumpet of Lady Farrington to favour that patient personage with some inconsequent remark. Lord Lancaster became its subject, for he at the moment sprang from the sofa, and left the box.

Lady Clara's eye followed him when he disappeared, as though she almost regretted his departure, though he had not spoken ten sentences since his arrival: Harcourt interpreted the feeling at once,—already Lady Clara *feared* herself. It is an evil hour in which a woman suffers that fact to be discovered!

"Will he be here to-night?" Frank asked, carelessly, as he possessed himself of her ladyship's vinaigrette, and gently compressed the fingers from whose clasp he withdrew it.

"Here! oh, no—I told him that I had filled my box"—and then, as if suddenly conscious that she had made an indiscreet confidence, she rapidly added, "I *did* expect some friends to join me who have not arrived."

"Of course," said Harcourt, quietly; "I naturally inferred that such was the case."

There was a slight pause, during which the gentleman admired the turn of his own ankle, and the fit of his own glove; and the lady wondered whether he really did think that she expected friends, or if he understood that she merely wished to prevent the intrusion of her husband.

"Verily, Frank Harcourt!" mentally soliloquized that excellent individual, "thou art in a sufficiently peculiar position—in love with one who did but glance like a will-o'-the-wisp across thy path, to bewilder thee, and then disappear;—engaged in a flirtation (to speak leniently) with another, who seems well inclined to lead thee into a worse quagmire than the first;—and affianced to a third, who

is about as loveable as Lot's wife when she became a pillar of salt ! But courage, Frank ! the wife is a gilded pill—and as for the cara, she is past the age of 'all for love,' and will keep up appearances with the world for her own sake." And he smiled as he remembered that Nichols had undertaken to be his tutor in worldliness—even Nichols himself ! but the schoolmaster was abroad, and he needed no more instruction. He had made considerable progress in the world's ways since he quailed under the idea of a marriage de convenance—and no man knew better than himself the value of a striking person, and unabashable impudence :—he was aware that it was often called by a softer name—self-possession, and knowledge of the world—and truly it was both ; a self-possession and a knowledge of the world of which Frank, though he had his own designation for the quality, determined to avail himself to the utmost.

"You are of the Cumberland Harcourts, are you not ?" asked Lady Clara, anxious to break in upon a pause whose extreme awkwardness was becoming oppressive.

"Yes," replied Frank, who had been ignorant until that moment that Cumberland held a family of the name.

"I thought so—I have heard papa mention Harcourt Castle as one of the finest specimens of Elizabethan architecture in England ; there is something very respectable in those ancient baronetcies."

"Very," acquiesced the young barrister, by no means eager to encourage the topic.

"What relation is Sir Theodore to you ?" pursued Lady Clara, believing that the inquiry must be gratifying to the vanity of her companion.

"Sir Theodore—oh !"—and Harcourt was puzzled.
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zled for a moment: "Sir Theodore—he is—my father's elder brother,—my uncle."

"The black eyes of Mr. Esham's bride, on which you are gazing so intently, must have bewildered you," smiled the lady, somewhat bitterly; "Sir Theodore cannot be thirty years of age."

"I *am* bewildered, my dear Lady Clara, though not with the dark-browed Spaniard:—the last baronet, I should have said, was my uncle—Sir Theodore is my cousin—but—we are not on terms—I am in a peculiar position—there is a jealousy—"

"Yes, yes, I understand," smiled Lady Clara; "in the event of Sir Theodore dying childless, you are the next of kin—the circumstance always creates jealousy. What a darling passion is family pride! and, in truth, it is a very natural one. What can be more spirit-stirring than to see yourself surrounded by the escutcheons of your race, as you ever are in those fine old houses, where your winged dragon, or boar's head, as the case may be, grins down on you from every arch and portal; reminding you at once of the ancient blood which flows in your veins, and of the gallant deeds of your ancestors by whom those trophies were won!"

"I have lost all relish for armorial bearings and heraldic monstrosities," said Frank, carelessly; "since one occasion on which I played cicerone at a friend's place in the country to a party of ladies: the fine old hall, and the spacious staircase were of black oak, and most elaborately wrought; the family arms being carved with every variety of ornament that could offer an excuse for their interminable repetition; the lion rampant supporting an antique shield duly emblazoned with the many quarterings of the family surmounted the great staircase, and the encomiums of an elderly gentlewoman

who was on my arm were at length terminated as she caught sight of these, by the exclamation of—
‘Very pretty indeed, very pretty, and vastly ingenious; but pray, what is the meaning of that monkey playing the harp?’—So much for armorial bearings!”

Lady Clara laughed heartily, “How perfectly absurd!”

“I vouch for the fact of the absurdity nevertheless; it was enough to rouse the buried barons from their stone sarcophagi in the neighbouring church, where they lie with closed visors and clasped hands side by side with their shrouded dames—Pasta is divine to-night!”

* The box-door opened, and Lord George Luttrell entered: “How do, Lady Clara, ten thousand congratulations on your marriage; not met you since—only just arrived from Vienna;—sad bore to find all the fine women married when one comes home—never met your lord, never heard of him before to my knowledge;—you must introduce me. Pasta’s tame to-night, don’t you think so?—How do, Lady Farrington?—what a bore it must be to be deaf;—what does she come here for?—she might as well take a seat in a rookery;—shouldn’t admit her, Lady Clara, shouldn’t, upon my honour; she’s neither useful nor ornamental—”

Lady Clara thought otherwise.

“That pretty Spaniard with the French ambassador would set off your box famously; contrast of style, don’t you think so?—midnight and morning, you and she—not a bad idea, is it?—you’d have all the good men in your box,—Lancaster’s crazy about her; Esham ran away with her from her father, a surly old grandee, who was going to make a nun of her; quite romantic, wasn’t it? He gave her some money, though; after they’d begged pardon, and

all that sort of thing, which was lucky ; but the old gentleman threatened Esham with a poniard for a considerable time ;—great bore, being stabbed by one's father-in-law, and getting no money with one's wife, wouldn't it ?”

“ There are many bores in this life,” coldly remarked Frank.

“ Bores ?—oh, yes ;—do you know, Lady Clara, talking of bores, I'm just off for Naples, going out in the suite of the new ambassador ?—my governor insists that I have talents for diplomacy ; great bore to leave town in the height of the season, isn't it ?—but the ambassador has a pretty wife, and I want to learn the best method of dressing macaroni.”

“ Two very important considerations,” said Lady Clara.

“ Very,” replied Lord George, gravely ; “ they determined me—I could not have endured to be domesticated with a wide mouth and small eyes ; or to sit at table, and see a woman dissect poultry with hands as large as the chickens she was disjointing !—and as one likes to learn something wherever one goes, I am glad that I shall have an opportunity of being initiated into the true system of preparing macaroni ; it's a bore to go abroad, and then return no wiser than one went.”

“ Very true,” said Harcourt ; “ and pray what knowledge may your lordship have acquired at Vienna ?”

“ At Vienna ?—oh, at Vienna I learned to smoke, sad bore—for it always made me sick ; but I was determined to persevere : I was ill for three weeks from morning till night : led the life of a dog ;—but I wouldn't be beat, and now I can smoke five cigars before breakfast.”

“ Most praiseworthy perseverance,” observed Lady Clara, smothering a yawn.

"Mr.—what's his name, Lady Clara?" resumed the lordling; "your caro sposo I mean; he's not here to-night, is he?—ha!—I thought not;—not up to this kind of thing yet, I suppose: well, that's quite as well, for it's a great bore when a man can't get near a woman to speak to her, without treading on her husband's toes—I hate all husbands, except as stop-gaps; they're generally like a gargle, three parts water and one part vinegar; sure to set your teeth on edge, and very likely to choke you—great bore, after all, husbands—don't you think so? I'm sure you do, though you don't consider it pretty to own it;—you'll agree with me by the time I return from Naples, I'm certain you will."

Lady Clara agreed with him at that moment; but nevertheless one portion of his harangue had brought the blood into her face; to know that Nichols was food for the superciliousness of a fool!—her husband; but she let it pass; she hated the very chance of an argument on such a subject, for she felt that the world's dread laugh would be against her.

"Why, you are positively en reine, Lady Clara; the very queen of diamonds;—Lovell called you just now Lady Golconda, when Count Coranouski, who wants to know every one, inquired who you were,—clever, wasn't it?—but the best of the joke was, that the Pole pointed out Mr. Harcourt, and asked if the very distingué-looking person who had been sitting beside you all the evening were Lord Golconda;—how we all laughed—"

"And what said Mr. Lovell?" demanded Lady Clara, with a rising frown.

"Oh! Lovell?—why he said that by the time Coranouski had been six months in England, he would know that the very fact of his having sat so

long near you rendered it impossible that he could be your husband—ha! ha! ha! he astonished the poor Pole; and that Lord Golconda was probably in the heart of the mountain, if not in your ladyship's; great bore to be bear-leader to an inquisitive foreigner, who is patronised by the prime minister; I should never survive it."

"Is that Count Coranouski with the blond mustache?" asked Harcourt.

"Yes, that is he, looks like consolidated milk and water, doesn't he?—Great bore to have such a complexion, isn't it?" answered Lord George, forgetting his own at the moment: "Good-by, Lady Clara; if I can do any thing for you at Naples, command me; you know I'm always delighted to be of use to you—shall see you again when I return to England, no fear of you now—you are plantée, you know."—And Lord George disappeared.

Harcourt glanced towards Lady Clara: she was the very personification of suppressed rage; her lip quivered, her cheeks were crimson, and a tear, which would not fall, flashed in her eye. This was the very moment when every tone and look of tenderness would sink into her heart's core; when she was writhing under a fool's aimless, intentionless prattle;—smarting from the random shafts of a thoughtless boy.

"Give me at least credit for patience," said Frank, in his most honeyed tone, as he drew his seat farther into the shadow of the curtain, and nearer to Lady Clara, "that I have so long forborne to press you for an answer to the query which I addressed to you two hours past: dear Lady Clara, do I not merit to have it answered, were it only for my philosophical endurance of those two hours of suspense?"

"Your query?" said the lady, with a slight start,

"I have answered all your queries—all, at least, that—"

"That you are inclined to answer," interposed Frank: "nay, then, I shall content myself with the inference—"

Lady Clara coloured painfully. "What inference?"

"Do you ask me?" said Harcourt, with emphasis; "retrace our acquaintance step by step, even to its commencement; remember when and where I have looked and listened; how many bright smiles, how many gracious words my assiduities have won for me from time to time;—and do you, can you, dear Lady Clara, ask me *what* inference? Alas that the cold, callous, calculating necessities of the world should have indeed thus sealed my lips, and withered up my feelings!—yes, I should indeed have known—have felt—have whispered to my blighted hopes, the solacing conviction that you never could have loved him; that an ambitious father, a haughty name, an exalted station, forced upon you the measure you have adopted;—forgive me that I ever suspected otherwise, my dear, dear Lady Clara; forgive me, I should indeed have known you better!"

"What a shameful flirtation there is going on in Lady Turner's box between Colonel Daubigny of the Blues and that pretty little Mrs. Atherton," said old Lady Farrington, suddenly bending forward; "it is really quite disreputable! I have been watching them this hour—it will be well if it ends in nothing worse—shocking, upon my word!" And the deaf marchioness looked most fearfully correct and dignified, as she wafted her fan to and fro with the deliberation and precision of the pendulum of a clock, perfectly unconscious that her words had stricken deeply into the consciences of both her

listeners. And yet Lady Clara could have thanked her for the interruption ; for, ill-worded as it was, it was nevertheless well-timed, as it obviated the necessity of her immediate reply to the tirade of Frank ; which, as it had originated in an unguarded remark of her own, she could not rebuke, and knew not how to resent. Their eyes met for an instant as the marchioness fell back upon her seat, and those of Lady Clara sank beneath the steady gaze of Harcourt. She felt giddy, and sick at heart. When she idly encouraged his attentions, it was but to feed her vanity, and to gratify her self-love ; she was wholly unprepared for the tone which he had so suddenly and so confidently assumed : she was no novice in the world's ways, and she well knew the precipice upon whose brink she stood ; she glanced hurriedly and anxiously towards the door of the box ; she would have even welcomed the return of Lord George, but he came not ; Harcourt gave her no assistance in overcoming her emotion ; he seemed to wait, as if with a desire to see how she would extricate herself from the dilemma in which her own remark and that of the marchioness had jointly placed her ; at length she made a violent effort, and turning towards him, she said, in an unsteady voice,

“ Mr. Harcourt, we appear to misunderstand each other—I do not comprehend—I cannot believe—”

“ Dearest Lady Clara,” interrupted Frank, “ there cannot exist any misunderstanding between us : do we misunderstand the light on which we look, the air we breathe, the sunshine which bathes our brow ? As soon could I misunderstand word or look of yours ! Hear me without a frown—do you doubt my honour ? *Can* you doubt your own ? Shame on the thought ! Then wherefore would you

—Come, come," he added, as he pressed the hand which was gathering up the folds of her mantle, "surely there is no cause for this; is not Nichols my friend, and are you not—alas! not what you were, not what I was mad enough to trust that you one day would be—but are you not—dear Lady Clara, are you not—his wife? Not for the wealth of worlds would I bring a shade on that fair brow: the one on my own heart is enough; do not deepen it by your scorn, your coldness. I can bear no more—and surely I deserve some pity, some indulgence—I deserve—I claim it!"

"And I, do I deserve no pity?" asked Lady Clara; "do I deserve no indulgence? is it fair, is it manly in you to make me conscious of my own weakness? to cast back upon me an unguarded remark, wrung from me in a moment of bitterness? Consider the position in which I stand, the step that I have taken: but I am only adding to the error I would fain retrieve; I am weakly exposing the wound which, scorpion-like, I myself inflicted; I am, in short, doing that which, beyond all other fatuity, I despise; I am playing the woman. Forget, Mr. Harcourt, if you indeed, as you profess to do, value my friendship and regard, forget all that has passed this evening."

"When I forget myself," replied Frank, passionately, "it is easy to ask this; to do it were impossible."

A burst of applause, elicited by the matchless tones of Pasta, drowned the remainder of his reply.

The next individual who entered the box was the Earl of Somerville: his lordship was unusually gracious; he had just left —'s, he had won largely, drank triflingly, and saw every thing *couleur de rose*; he even complimented the old marchioness on her coiffure, and his daughter on her good looks;

and what was of infinitely more consequence to Lady Clara on this occasion, he remained quietly at her side until the commencement of the ballet, and then accompanied her home to supper.

CHAPTER XI.

EUSTACE had just settled himself for the evening ; his curtains were closely drawn, his reading-lamp stood beside him, and his table was covered with manuscripts, which he was collating and arranging for the ensuing number of the periodical of which he was co-editor : he was more than usually indulgent on the present occasion to the writers of love-verses, and the manufacturers of sentiment ; he loved to linger on images of beauty, and he found the terseness and energy of his own style strangely softened by vagrant fancies and beautiful imaginings, bordering fearfully on poetry and romance. Eustace smiled as he terminated a very sonorous period in a political article which he was writing : " Agnes, Agnes, this will never do ! " he murmured to himself ; " I shall degenerate into a sonneteer, and play the rhymers, if I write with the memory of your black eyes thus before me ; were you at my side, then indeed—" and he laid down his pen to settle the question with himself whether he should truly follow the stream boldly, instead of lingering among the flowers on its bank, when she should be really beside him. Oh, yes ; how many combined causes would operate to call forth every effort of his genius then ! but meanwhile, the thought of her strangely undermined his industry. He would

not own even to himself that he had difficulty in arranging his ideas—he would not throw aside his task, and abandon it for the evening ; but he dallied away an hour in luxurious idleness, trying to cheat himself into a belief that he was busy ; while in truth the pen moved listlessly and fitfully, and his mind wandered away from the subject on which he was ostensibly engaged, to dwell on Agnes, and to call up dreams of their future existence. Suddenly Eustace heard a well-known step ascending the stairs ; the door opened, and Mr. Brockendon entered.

“Am I not a bold man to beard the lion in his den ?” asked the visiter, as he drew a chair towards the table ; “where he is crouching, surrounded by the mangled fragments of the slain,—how many victims to-night ?”

“In truth, my dear sir, I am in no mood for victimizing,” said Eustace : “I have dipped my pen in honey, for I feel so light of heart that I would not hurt a fly.”

“Oh, that I had a work for review !” said Mr. Brockendon, gayly ; “quarto—nothing less—which I could put into your hand in so lucky a moment ! But now I look at you, I can well believe that you are, as you express it, light of heart—I can read it in your eye ; and yet your task is not one to engender gayety ; for, as you are obliged to read before you can condemn, I should imagine that your studies are not always of the most edifying description—the efforts of small wits with sublime pretensions—the tirades of slender politicians with substantial self-opinions—the lengthy and uninteresting productions of the dull, the ponderous effusions of the heavy, the vapid vagaries of the vain, and the egotistical fatuities of the ignorant.”

“Be merciful, I beseech of you !” laughed

Eustace ; “you are indeed applying the scalping-knife most unsparingly—look here, and here,” and he placed before Mr. Brockendon several manuscripts as he spoke. “Should not the perusal of such as these make us bear with the tedium of the less imaginative and talented ?”

“I admit it ; here, for instance, is the autograph of a man whose very name carries a charm with it, and gives promise of talent and originality,—a promise, too, which, unlike most others, is never broken. I like his warm, honest outpourings of the spirit, which are for ever treading on the heels of decorum, but keeping, nevertheless, however closely, in her wake ; I love his quaint Scotticisms ; no man understands better where and how to apply them—I always fancy I smell the heather when I take up one of his works. His prose writings are many of them extravagant, I admit it : but their extravagances are those of untamed genius ; and, after all, it is so rare a bird, that we should not desire to clip its wings. Then his ballads ! warm from the heart, redolent of love and farintosh—just what Scottish ballads should be,—and he sings them, too ! sings them as he writes them,—needs there more ?—And this is the work of fair fingers—another endearing name ! the original writer of historical romance in England, no less amiable than talented : you may well be proud of your connexion with that lady : she is of a clever family—brother, sister, we are indebted to all three for many, many hours of enjoyment ; and these two gifted sisters may contemplate their work with the most beautiful feeling of self-respect : for neither the one nor the other has ever written

“One line which, dying, she would wish to blot.”

Estimable and beloved as individuals ; devoted children, sincere Christians, and graceful members of society ; they are in every point of view that which we picture to ourselves as the beau-ideal of an English woman !”*

“ What think you of this author ?” asked Eustace, as he held a paper towards him.

“ You may consider it strange, but I like him not : you say he is very popular, I know it—so is Punch. I do not like to see sense warped to suit sound ; he wears the cap and bells of the modern school of poetry ; and the oldest and gravest of us laugh, when we are in the mood, to hear him jingle them to a tune ; but nevertheless we still remember that the cap and bells are there.”

“ Pass him by ; the popular smile will revenge him. Whom have we here ?”

“ Ha ! my fresh-fingered favourite ! my painter of green fields and shady lanes ; the best narrator of a cottage love-tale, and the most graphic delineator of a cricket-match extant. I know her pet dog and her shady parlour as well as though I had patted the one and occupied the other. The very companion I would choose on a sunny evening, to sit with me under a tree, and drink syllabub,—I am sure she would make one to perfection. But she can do better things than these ; witness her tragedies : and then her genius appears inexhaustible ; you see her name perpetually, and never too often.”

“ The next is—”

“ One who is as popular as he deserves to be—a man who writes too much to do justice to himself, because he does it carelessly ; but look at the gen-

* Since the above paragraph was written, the grave has claimed the youngest of these gifted sisters : she died as she had lived, beloved by all who possessed the happiness of her acquaintance.

erality of his ballads,—they *must* be good, for they are on the lips of every itinerant singer in the streets of the metropolis—the best test, after all, of their truth and feeling ; to say that they are on the piano forte of every young lady in the kingdom were to say little,—so are fifty others ; so is all the namby-pamby which is wedded to a pretty air, and sold by a fashionable music-seller. I have heard him called a ‘carpet poet’—the designation does him no disgrace—he *is* a ‘carpet poet ;’ we domesticate him in our drawing-rooms, with our wives and daughters, for he never costs them a blush ; and if he sometimes fails in point, he never does in propriety. He has written for the stage, though I like him less there ; he is not at home upon the boards.—But enough of this ; I am ill-advised to play the critic before you—‘tis your vocation, Hal.’”

“Talk to me then of yourself, my dear sir,” said Eustace : “what better moment than this to fulfil your promise of confiding to me the history of that portion of your life of which I am as yet in ignorance ? If you still think me worthy of your confidence—if you still desire to bind me to you by a newer and a more intimate bond than even that which now attaches me so deeply to you, do not refuse to give me, here, and now, that full and perfect confidence which may enable me to look upon you as an old as well as a kind friend.”

“I know not why I have so long delayed my story,” was the reply of Mr. Brockendon, as a deep shade of sadness settled on his brow ; “yet there are sorrows which are almost renewed by description ; and I believe it is from a species of moral cowardice that I shrink from the task—it were difficult to decide what feeling prompted me to volunteer the recital ; for you are young, too young perhaps, Smithson, to be the depository of an old man’s

secret : yet I believe you to be only young in years : the mind, the heart, are independent of time—and I feel a morbid desire to retrace to you the few eventful years of my life—I might have found a score of listeners whom the world would consider far more fitted to share my confidence, but I know no other ear into which I would pour the tale of my secret grief. It is an old story, Smithson, so old, that you will, it may be, consider it scarce worth the telling ; but, like the wound of the warrior from whence the fragment of clothing has never been withdrawn, though the hurt be of remote standing, the evil is yet unremedied ; still draining slowly, but surely, the life-current which must fail at length. I was not always the person of habit and selfishness whom you now know me, with a smile for my own gratifications, and a sneer for the world's follies : high-spirited, sensitive, and enthusiastic, I was the creature of feeling—the very being whose lesson of endurance and disappointment was likely to be the most bitter and the most lasting. Need I tell you, that such as I have described myself, I was yet young when I discovered that all my enthusiasm, all my energies, might be concentrated on one object ; and that I loved with a devotedness, a passion at which worldlings would scoff, for they could never comprehend its intensity. But thus it was, Smithson : every thing bright and beautiful reminded me of *her*—every thing repulsive but showed me how dear an occupation it would be to remove such objects from her path of life—*her* idea was blended, as it were, with my heart's current. I had no hope, no aim, with which her image was not connected—no enjoyment save in contributing to her happiness. She was beautiful, very beautiful—with that mild, placid loveliness, of all others the most calculated to engage the affections of a nature like my own—

large, dark, soul-speaking eyes—it is strange, but none ever reminded me of them as yours do—at this very moment, shaded by sadness, they seem indeed her own, save that they want that subduing softness which the purity of woman's spirit alone can lend to them. Her cheek was very fair, and yet I could not call it pale, for the warm blood mantled it in a moment, and left it only more beautiful as it departed. Bear with me, as I retrace her image—her graceful, gentle motions, her sweet sad smile, her voice like the breathings of distant music;—I could have knelt and worshipped her—have folded her to my heart, and held her there for ever—I could have welcomed poverty and sorrow for her sake, and thought every suffering light, so long as she shared not in the pang—what could I not have done for her, had she become mine?—But she did not—she never loved me. I was long in believing this: I thought not of such a possibility—hurried on by my own headlong passion, I saw only in the gentle and pitying kindness of her manner the proof of reciprocal affection—nay, madman as I was, though I marked her eye glisten, and the crimson blood mount to her brow at another voice and another step, I heeded not the warning: in my infatuation, I would not be convinced; and I lived on for months in a paradise of my own creation—an Eden of imagination, which was to be withered by a breath. The bolt fell at last: fortune had been propitious to my wishes; a distant relative, in dying, had bequeathed to me a property of sufficient value to justify me, in the eyes of the world, in offering a home to the idol of my existence: before I possessed the gold, I had scarcely reflected on its want; but now the consciousness of its value came upon me like a bright vision—it might win for me the favour of her parents—it might, it must—for what

parent could be insensible to the benefit of his child ? I knew that individually I was not displeasing to them, but I had hitherto been comparatively poor—now, however, I was poor no longer ; and with a flushed brow and a fevered pulse, I hurried to tell the tale of my prosperity to Ellena. Then, and only then, Smithson, the bitter, the maddening truth broke upon me ; she heard me calmly, kindly, it is true, but with the cold smile which told that no self-gratulation was at her heart—she even extended her hand to me as she murmured out a few words of congratulation ; I clasped 'it in mine, but I did not retain it for a second—it rested cold and nerveless as marble in the fevered palm on which it lay—and yet, idiot that I was ! even thus I would not be convinced—and falling at her feet, I poured out the frantic tale of my passionate affection. The start of wonder—the blush of regretful timidity—the large tear which swelled in her mild eye as she listened, convinced me that my ill-fated attachment had been unsuspected as well as unreturned. In vain I pleaded, urged, almost wept ; for I felt that the happiness of my existence hung upon the decision of that hour—though she bore with my impetuosity patiently and compassionately, I could work no alteration in her resolve—she forgave a thousand wild reproaches and complaints, for she felt that they were unmerited, and that even as I uttered them, my heart negatived the violence of my lips. She spoke to me kindly and soothingly ; but I could not listen : my brain burned, and my temples throbbed almost to bursting ; at length her pity for my emotion overcame the delicate reluctance of her nature—she thought that she could show me the utter hopelessness of my suit by confiding to me the hidden secret of her soul, and that the conviction would calm me at once—she did it, gene-

rously and nobly did it; though in the effort the blood rushed painfully over her brow and bosom, and her voice faltered in the utterance—how had she mistaken me! how had she over-rated the magnanimity of my spirit! She told me that she loved another—this was the secret which was to teach my fevered pulses to be still, and the warm blood to course more calmly through the recesses of my heart! She named him too—and I rushed from her presence with the brand of wretchedness upon my brow.—How I hated the gold which I had loved so well but a few hours previously, when I remembered that she had given her heart, that heart for which I would have bartered all, to one on whom the world frowned; for noble, estimable, and high-minded as he was, he was poor, very poor; the son of honourable but needy parents, and the possessor of a scanty curacy in a remote part of England. Smithson, my blighted hopes had made a demon of me. Had I been worthy of *her* friendship, I should have disposed of my newly-acquired wealth in providing for her welfare; in conciliating the disappointed parents who wrung her young heart by their reproaches and displeasure—I might, I should have done this; but I did it not:—I fled from England; I left her to struggle with her love and her helplessness, when I might have smoothed her path to comfort and to peace. I knew that her love had ultimately triumphed, but I asked no more. I loved her still, fondly, passionately; but with a selfishness which forbade me to sacrifice one feeling of resentment to her happiness. From that period I have been a blighted man—blighted in spirit and in mind: the little good which I have effected has been ever over-weighed by the sense of that which I omitted to do—and the prayers which I nightly offer up are deadened, for I feel that I dare not ask to be forgiven

as I forgive ; when even now, in the decline of my days, with my hair whitened by time and my hand palsied by increasing feebleness, a feeling of aversion creeps over my heart whenever the thought of the calm, and pious, and gentle Edward Eustace comes across my mind.—You shrink from me as I make the avowal, Smithson ; I do not wonder at your recoil : I almost shrink from myself as I give it utterance.”

“ You mistake me, my best friend ; you mistake yourself,” said Eustace, convulsively ; “ you do not, you cannot hate the husband of her whom you loved so fondly, the father of him whom you have rescued from penury and despair.” As he spoke, he drew from his bosom the miniature of his mother, and held it towards his astonished and agitated guest ; “ from the grave she calls on you to revoke that sentence of undying hatred ; from the grave he bids you forget all enmity, and let him sleep in peace beside her whom he loved so fondly upon earth.”

“ Dead !” feebly gasped Mr. Brockendon, as he hurriedly possessed himself of the miniature, and gazed fixedly upon it ; “ dead !—both dead !—and you ?—no, it is some illusion, some waking dream of the over-excited imagination, too wild for reality ; and yet, it is herself—she who was ever dearer to me than the air I breathe ; my own gentle, forgiving, uncomplaining Ellena ; but now I rave indeed—his Ellena, the wife of his bosom, the mother of his children, the partner of his poverty, the solace of his sorrows,—and you, Smithson, you—I am bewildered, stunned,—explain this mystery,—and quickly, for my brain whirls, and I am sick at heart.”

Eustace did explain ; and ere long he was pressed to the breast of Mr. Brockendon with almost frightful energy. “ Her son !” he murmured to himself, “ her only son ! Madman, dolt that I have been

never to discover this !, and now it seems so plain, so palpable—the voice, the look, the smile ; all that I loved in her appears to live again, and for me. Yes, Mortimer, to you I may cling without a fear of the return of that deadly blight which paralyzed the best years of my manhood ; there will be no one to rob me of your affection, to deprive me of your love ; now indeed I have found a resting-place for my declining years, a staff for my failing strength. Great Heaven ! how many a feeling rushes back upon my heart ! And is she really dead ? So young, so beautiful, so beloved ; could not the grave have found a more fitting inmate ? Must I outlive all who were dear to me, and stand alone like a blighted tree, when the tempest has swept away all around me ? Dead ! then repentance has indeed come too late ; and she must have loathed all memory of the man whose valueless love reached not beyond his own narrow self !—too late ! too late ! I have remained irresolute and supine, when I might have become happy in her happiness, and now she is gone where no earthly aid can reach her : but you, Mortimer, you are yet left to me. In your welfare her sainted spirit may still know joy ; from henceforth come to my heart, and be to me as a son. Now indeed I feel why my spirit yearned to you when we first met. Strange, most strange, that we should thus have crossed each other in the wide highway of life ; but I am thankful that it is so ; the son of Ellena and the pupil of the pious Edward Eustace must be well worthy of all the affection which my care-worn heart can yet bestow ; and wrung as it has been by sorrow, blighted as it has been by disappointment, bowed as it will ever be by a sense of its own supineness, still can it offer a father's affection and a father's interest to Mortimer Eustace."

"I already owe all which I possess to your benevolence," interposed the excited young man, as Mr. Brockendon paused in violent emotion; "without your helping hand I should have been trodden under foot by the world's crowd; lost in the throng amid which I can now walk, humbly it is true, but safely."

"But her son must do something more—must, did I say?—will do something more: the pupil of a pious and Christian father, and of a mother whose graceful nature was full of gentleness and virtue, cannot fail to live honourably and happily. Thus for you I have no fears, Mortimer; I have watched you, thought upon you, tracked you throughout every transaction since I met you first; before I guessed by how dear a bond we were to be united. I have expected much from you, and you have not failed; adversity left you as upright as it found you; nor will prosperity make you less worthy. I can but talk of yourself to-night; I dare scarcely glance at her—to-morrow, perhaps, but not now, not now—"

Mr. Brockendon rose as he spoke; "Good-night, Eustace; I must go home, and strive in the solitude of my own apartment to comprehend all that I have heard this evening. Surely these things are ordered; they cannot be the effect of chance, after so many years, barren alike of interest and of tidings,—but, good-night,—no, not a step; I must be alone." And forcing Eustace back into the seat from which he had risen to accompany the old gentleman, as he was accustomed to do, in his homeward path, Mr. Brockendon, with a kind but sorrowing smile, slowly left the room.

CHAPTER XII.

THE day had at length arrived on which Eustace was for the last time to pass the little wicket of the home of Agnes ; her home no longer, for she also was about to quit it for ever. Dreary and uninviting as it was, Eustace loved it, for there he had held the orphan to his heart, and won her young affection. Yet it was with an unclouded brow that he met her, for he felt, with the quick instinct of sincere tenderness, that to Agnes the wrenching asunder of the last link which bound her even to *such* a home must have its bitterness ; and that it was to him only that she could turn for comfort in the trial. The proud and the prosperous may smile at the idea of connecting any, even the slightest suffering, with the thought of departing from a scene of poverty and privation like the one on which the orphan was about to cast a last look : but here, poor and humble as it was, she had first felt the delight of being beloved ; here she had last beheld the protecting friend of her infancy ; here she had listened to the sweet, sad tale of her departed mother's gentleness and virtue : and there were many memories, trivial and minute though they might be, which filled her eyes with tears, and called a sigh to her young lips, as she collected together her scanty wardrobe to depart. In *this* narrow and cheerless room she had toiled to earn for her aged relative the few luxuries, and they were few indeed, which her declining years had known : in *that* she had listened to the words of kindly counsel which had been uttered by her failing

voice ; her life had been uneventful, but a little world of feeling had been opened to her *here*. She paused an instant in her occupation as the conviction crossed her mind, and one large tear fell heavily upon her cheek. But here, too, she had won the love of Eustace ! and the tear was quickly wiped away, for even at that moment his well-known step was on the stair, and the tones of his clear and cheerful voice came like music to her ear. She gave one hasty glance at the mirror, brushed back the clinging curls from her pale brow, and turned, with the smile of innocent affection on her lips, to greet him as he entered.

Perhaps Agnes had never until that moment felt that she was beautiful ; but now, as her eyes fell beneath the admiring and impassioned gaze of her lover, while her cheek crimsoned, and her hand trembled in his clasp, she gloried in the conviction.

"My own sweet Agnes ! my beautiful ! my beloved !" exclaimed Eustace, as he pressed to his lips the small hand which had been extended to him ; "already prepared ?"

"In fact, but scarcely in will ; oh ! Eustace, how may I one day regret this humble, this mournful home ; here I have at least been contented, beloved,—here I first learned that I was dear to you ; Eustace, I seem as though I were about to part from an old friend."

"Nay, you must not talk so sadly, my own Agnes ; ere long all who look on you will be as friends,—dear friends, I trust,—but there must be one dearer than all the rest,—say, shall it not be so ?"

Eustace was answered by a look which shamed the poverty of words, and he was happy.

"Your love has changed my nature, Agnes," he pursued ; "the whole world appears in fellowship

with me ; and, in truth, Providence seems to smile upon my hopes, for a friend has been raised up for me, for us, who will, I trust, shorten the period of our separation, and enable me to provide a happy home for my gentle bride."

"Be not too sanguine, Eustace : alas ! I almost fear to hope."

"Why, I must chide you, silly one," said Mortimer, as he pressed his lips to her pale cheek ; "I have no fear ; and for your sake, I feel in love with all my kind,—and yet no, not with *all*,—there is one, Agnes,—do you remember him ? he was beside you when we first met."

"I do indeed remember him," said Agnes, with a slight shudder and a flushed brow.

"To him only can I never extend the hand of amity ; I trust that we may never meet again,—I would not breathe the same atmosphere with him,—I should hate the very earth on which his foot had rested ; I shall pursue him to the death with an undying enmity."

"Eustace !" exclaimed the agitated girl, "surely you rave,—you, whom I have loved so fondly, and ever thought upon as the gentlest and the kindest,—oh, Eustace, I know you not in such a paroxysm of passion."

"I am rebuked, Agnes ; I should not have breathed my hatred to you ; and yet, surely you will forgive me : injury to myself I could pardon and forget, but wrong to you will never leave my memory. But we will not talk of this, love ; the world is wide enough for all, and we may never meet again."

"Now you are once more my own Mortimer," said Agnes, as she playfully wreathed her slender fingers in his clustering hair, and bent over him with one of her sweetest smiles ; "my own gentle-

hearted Mortimer; that bold bad man will travel through life by a prouder path than we are likely to tread, and thus we shall escape collision,—his will be the sunny highway of fashion, ours the shady hedgerow of humble unpretending competency; why then should we scare ourselves with shadows like frightened children? has not your Agnes now one friend able and willing to protect her from idleness and impertinence?"

"As he would guard his own soul! And yet, Agnes, I would not see that man beside you again,—gazing on you,—speaking to you the words of passion."

"You will not, you will not, Eustace: who should be chidden now? whose are the idle fears? fy upon you for such groundless phantasies,—if you indeed love like me—"

"If I do not love more, Agnes,—rather say this; are not my thoughts full of you? have my hopes, my ambition, another aim, another object? Is it not the very intensity of my passion which makes me jealous of your happiness? of my own hold upon your heart? And we are about to part, Agnes: your actions will be controlled, your leisure hours invaded, your affections perhaps taxed. Oh! Agnes, a sudden cloud has fallen upon me."

"Eustace, you do me less than justice," said Agnes, with proud tenderness; "my heart was a willing gift to you, nor can it ever be withdrawn: circumstances may indeed thwart my affections, but never change them. I only ask of you to judge me candidly and fairly, and not to attribute to coldness on my part that which may be the effect of another's caprice. But we are surely tormenting ourselves gratuitously, and I am to blame to treat the subject in so grave a tone: is it not enough that we must part for a time this very day? must we

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also, by weak and groundless fancies, study to make our parting even more sad than of itself it would be?"

"We will not, dearest, for that indeed were idle: and you will win every heart, Agnes; your gentle beauty will overcome every feeling of that coldness which would chill you in your stranger-home; you will be happy,—and for myself, shall I not be blessed in toiling for your sake, to win by my efforts another and a fonder dwelling-place for you? Yes, Agnes, though we may be for a while parted, you will be ever present to my thoughts."

As Eustace spoke, Agnes busied herself mournfully, but resolutely, in preparing for her departure. She tied on her close mourning-bonnet, and concealed her slight figure amid the folds of her sable cloak.

"I am ready now," she murmured beneath her breath, as a large tear fell upon her cheek, and she turned a long, regretful glance on the narrow room, endeared to her by a thousand fond though sad recollections.

"So soon, Agnes?" asked Eustace, almost reproachfully; "remember that we shall never stand again beneath this roof, hand in hand, as we do now; the day is yet young,—lay aside your cloak for a while."

"It is better as it is," sighed the orphan; "I would fain depart calmly from my poor home, and I feel that my firmness is already failing me. Eustace, on what an unknown world am I about to be cast?" And overwhelmed with the idea, she threw herself again upon the sofa in a passion of tears.

"My own sweet Agnes! my love! my wife!" whispered Mortimer, as he sprang to her side, and raised her drooping head upon his shoulder; "will

you abandon this reluctantly-offered home? will you resign this cold, unsympathizing relative? will you be mine at once and for ever? only say that you will be mine at once,—mine, Agnes, to-morrow,—only say so, and these shall be the last tears which shall ever be wrung from you by doubt. We may indeed be poor in gold, but we shall be rich in love; the world may frown upon us, but we shall be every thing to each other. Speak, Agnes, my own Agnes; shall it indeed be so?"

"Eustace," said Agnes, tenderly, "you cannot guess how gladly I would turn from the storm of doubts and fears which now assail me, to the haven of your affection; but it must not be,—the finger of the dead has pointed out my path, and I will follow it. The thought of one day becoming the partner of your fortunes, of sharing alike in your pleasures and in your griefs, will uphold me in the busy solitude of my new home: but I must obey *her* bidding. I thought not to have laid bare the weakness of my spirit thus, but I am worn down by sorrow, and you will pity rather than blame me. Urge me not, then, dearest Eustace, to a step which would be faulty; urge me not, for too well you know that my own heart would prompt me to comply, did not a sense of right counteract its weakness."

"You owe nothing whatever to this unknown relative, Agnes," persisted Mortimer; "absolutely nothing: for her very promise of protection was rather wrung from her than offered."

"Hush! Eustace—do not breathe such inferences, I implore of you—my situation is already sufficiently distressing:—the obedience which I owe to the dead I will pay—would that I could do it more willingly! And now, love, let us depart; we have already loitered too long beside a hearth which is no longer

ours, but which will ever be dear to my heart, whether it beat with joy or sorrow."

As Agnes spoke, she hastily left the room; and Eustace heard her light foot in the apartment above, in which Mrs. Sydenham had died. He longed to withdraw her from a scene so likely to unnerve her already-failing spirits; but a sense of delicacy, mingled with awe, withheld him from intruding on her solitude. In a short time she returned; her cheek was pale, and her lip quivered, but she had not shed a tear.

"My mother's picture, Eustace," she said, with suppressed emotion: "guard it, I beseech you, as the dearest treasure of your Agnes; take it to your home,—you will look upon it with affection and reverence for my sake; I could not bear, much as I shall miss it, to carry it where cold and scornful eyes might rest upon it,—be it as a cherished bond between us, and let the gentle portrait of the mother remind you, as you look upon it, of the affection of the child."

Eustace replied only by straining the orphan to his heart; he saw that she had nerved herself for the trial, and he would not utter a syllable calculated to shake her self-possession. After the lapse of a moment, Agnes withdrew herself from his embrace, looked once more around her in silence, and then turning towards him with a faint smile, led the way from her bereaved and solitary home.

CHAPTER XIII.

"HA ! ha ! ha ! ha ! ha ! so you are fairly caught, eh, Frank ?" exclaimed Nichols, as he led the way to Lady Clara's morning-room ; "a benedict *in petto* !"

"Hush ! hush ! my good fellow ; there is no occasion to proclaim it to the world, to paragraph it in women's prattle, to announce it to one's acquaintance, to expose it to the bavardage of the *boûdoir*," said Frank, somewhat pettishly ; "I have no ambition to walk about, ticketed like a haunch of prize mutton or a cheap gingham. Do be a little more *sotto voce* in your congratulations, for absolutely I *will not* be proclaimed."

"As what, Mr. Harcourt ?" asked Lady Clara, who had overheard his deprecatory harangue.

"As an engaged man," said Nichols, disregarding the imploring looks of his companion ; "as the successful suitor of seven thousand a year—as the heart-elected of a fair lady."

Lady Clara bit her lips, and blushed slightly. "Indeed !" she said, coldly, as she glanced at Harcourt, and remarked that his brow was crimson ; "I did not guess—I was not aware—"

"Oh ! Frank's wooing has not been a very tedious one," said Nichols, gayly ; "he was never made to linger long in doubt : the history of his courtship is—"

"This is really too bad," said Harcourt, in a tone of vexation ; "really, Nichols—really, Lady Clara—"

"Oh! there needs no explanation, Mr. Harcourt," interposed the hostess, with a haughty laugh; "nor will I suffer Mr. Nichols to give one: it is certainly not his province. Suffer me, however, to offer my congratulations on the happy prospect which is before you—with a wealthy and, of course, a beautiful bride (for Mr. Harcourt would never, I am sure, see his table headed by any thing less than a houri); you will be the admiration and envy of all London. May I inquire when the marriage is to take place? It will be food for the journals for a week—it will rouse us from our lethargy, for we are really stultifying this season. May I ask the name of the fair bride? is it romantic, or right honourable? Are we to be blinded by diamonds, or smothered in roses? Is the heureux ménage to be located in a Piccadilly mansion, or a cottage ornée 'far from the din of cities'? Is it to be dash, or devotion? Splendour, or solitude? Knowing what I do of one of the parties, I am 'naturally curious as to particulars.'"

There was a tone of sarcasm running through the catechistical questionings of Lady Clara, which, even while its bitterness flattered his vanity, nevertheless made Frank writhe. He knew so well what would follow—he could already hear the derisive laugh, the mocking misconstruction, the biting jest.

"I will leave you to tell the tale," said Nichols, mischievously, as he prepared to quit the room; "I should only mar the romance of the story by venturing on the subject in my unvarnished prose, and I have a sick horse to visit;—but, prithee, Frank, be not too eloquent on the lady's merits—do not raise the anxiety of Lady Clara to make her acquaintance to a pitch of pain, for we cannot now intrude upon

her until she has become Mrs. Harcourt." And Nichols departed.

The brow of Lady Clara was as black as night ; her lip quivered, and she turned away from Harcourt in silence.

"My dear Lady Clara," commenced Frank, resolutely, as he rose from his seat and approached her, "if you knew, if you could guess how every look of yours thrills to my heart, you would not turn from me with that frown."

"Practice has perfected you in the art of saying polite things, Mr. Harcourt," said the lady, with a disdainful smile ; "but I am by no means inclined to forward your accomplishments in my proper person :—your civil speeches, sir, will be more acceptable elsewhere."

Harcourt cast himself on a chair beside her in affected emotion, and for a time neither spoke.

"If you would so far honour me," at length commenced Frank, in a suppressed tone of apparently wounded feeling, "as to listen to *my* version of this affair—"

"What affair, sir?" asked Lady Clara, turning suddenly towards him, and raising her eyes steadily to his face.

Frank shrank from the startling and unlooked-for question : could there be a doubt as to what "affair" he alluded to ? no, surely not ; Lady Clara knew full well what he meant ; but she had resolved to render the awkwardness of his explanation as great as it was in her power to make it : "My—matrimonial affair," he stammered out, with some difficulty ; and then instantly recovering his self-possession, he continued more volubly, "I need not tell Lady Clara Nichols that I am poor—had it been otherwise, then indeed—but it is worse than idle to renew the miserable memories of the past year. As

little is it necessary for me to tell her, that those who are gliding down the stream of fashion cannot exist upon the straws which are floating upon its surface—she has herself proved that she is aware of this—”

Lady Clara flushed slightly, but continued silent.

“In this dilemma, what remained for me to do? She who alone had ever been the object of my heart’s idolatry was lost to me for ever—not by death, for then I could have vowed myself to her memory, but by marriage with another. Thus situated, dearest Lady Clara,” he continued, as he laid his hand tenderly on that of the lady, which rested on the cushion of the sofa, “my path was plain: the beloved one of my soul yet smiled upon me as a friend; yet welcomed me to her splendid home, and I felt that I had not courage to forego the blessing of her society—I resolved therefore to make such a marriage as should enable me still to enjoy that blessing. I looked not for beauty—the world contained but one image of beauty to *my* heart, and that was lost to me; I sought not for youth—I cared not for fashion—I panted no longer for proud station, nor high birth—I thought only of winning a home, where I might dream securely of my heart’s idol, wholly, undividedly:—I wished not that my fancy should be distracted by conflicting claims—I had vowed allegiance in my spirit to my first, my only passion; and I felt that even had I willed it, it was now beyond my power to break my faith. What then am I about to do?—I will tell you, beloved Lady Clara; I am about to marry one who is wealthy—who will enable me at least to linger near the Eden which I can never enter—who is old, *very* old—unprepossessing;—but what care I, with a pre-engaged heart, for this? for any thing? You know the truth—and tell me, do you, *can* you still think that I deserve that blighting

frown, that withering displeasure with which you greeted me on my arrival?"

"I ought not to listen to you, Mr. Harcourt—I must not—remember, I am married—and you, yourself—you will ere long be wedded to another, who will have a claim upon every thought, every feeling."

Harcourt laughed the bitter hollow laugh of heartlessness—"My thoughts! my feelings!" he said, scornfully; "thought is free—feeling cannot be compelled;—can a priest bind the heart with the hand? can he bestow the soul along with the name? If he can indeed do this, then shall my wife fetter my every word, my every look, and I will bear all uncomplainingly; but if he have no power to do so, I must still turn to the loadstar of my destiny, as the Mussulman turns towards Mecca—yes, here, here must I turn—to you, dearest Lady Clara; and even although you may chide, you cannot banish me; for the world is trumpet-tongued, and, unsatisfied with effects, will still pry into causes—but you have *no* cause of displeasure—am I to blame? or will you, can you blame me? No, no; I read your answer in that kind, forgiving smile; I am free to tell you that I love you."

"No, no," said Lady Clara, hurriedly, but gently; "you must not, indeed you must not: did I not remember that you are a fashionable trifler, and have a select set of phrases for the whole sex, I should not have listened to you so long. Go, go, I forgive you; but you must leave your clasp of my fingers, and find another seat—nay, I am serious."

"And so am I," said the unabashable Frank, without moving an inch, and still retaining his clasp of the jewelled hand which he had taken; "and, moreover, you know that I am no trifler—that I have bent the knee at no shrine but yours—and I

shall punish you for your apostacy—these little fingers shall remain prisoners until you ransom them by one of the sparkling circlets with which they are now adorned—nay, nay, you cannot release them—you must pay the price.”

“This is really beyond a jest, Mr. Harcourt,” said Lady Clara, indignantly, as she still struggled to release her hand.

“Did I not tell you that I was serious?” replied Frank, who felt that if he did not now carry his point, he was ruined for ever with Lady Clara. “Why, one would imagine that I had asked for a barony! Did friend never bestow a gift on friend? or does Lady Clara Nichols imagine that I would ask any thing of her which it would be incorrect for her to grant?”

“It might not be incorrect—that is, the fact may of itself be simple—but what would the world say on seeing a trinket (and such a trinket!) which had once been in the possession of Lady Clara Nichols, on the person of Mr. Harcourt?”

“And do you really believe me to be so heartless a coxcomb,” said Frank, “as to *display* such a gift? do you believe that a ring received from *you* will ever encircle my finger, while I have a heart for it to rest against? How little do you understand me yet!”

During this sentimental tirade, Harcourt had been busily engaged in drawing off a little turquoise “forget-me-not” from the hand of the lady; and as the resistance, which he met with was but slight, he soon possessed himself of the trinket; and having pressed it to his lips, he drew a slight gold neck-chain from beneath his waistcoat, and passed it through the ring, concealing it once more carefully in its hiding-place.

What a specious compromise with conscience! Lady Clara would not sanction the theft of the ring,

because she was a married woman—her objection was overruled, for pledges of friendship were common even among the married—next she hesitated, fearful of what “the world” might say—and finally, she suffered a gift, which, yielded openly and honestly, to be worn according to its intention in the face of day, would have been merely an error, or a venial fault, to be perverted from its proper use, and pillowed on the very heart of one whose vanity, and not his feeling, had won the trophy.

“I should like,” said Lady Clara, anxious to terminate a silence which was embarrassing—a silence carefully preserved by Harcourt, and rendered doubly oppressive by his fixed and earnest, almost triumphant gaze—“I should like to know with how many other ‘souvenirs’ mine is now associated—are there numerous links in that chain of bright memories?”

“It stands alone—or rather it rests alone,” was the reply: “my heart beats against no other so dear. You smile! do you doubt me?” and he affected an effort to withdraw the chain from its resting-place.

“No, no,” said Lady Clara, hastily; “I am no familiar of the Inquisition—I have no wish to put you to ‘the question,’—I care not to pry into your secrets.”

“You care not! cruel Lady Clara—”

“I would say, I have no right.”

“Who then on earth possesses it, if you do not?”

“Fy that is folly!—your affianced bride.”

“Talk not, I pray you, of things almost coeval with the deluge—do not conjure up before me a shape as bulky and ungraceful as the ark, and loathings as numerous as its quadrupedal occupants.”

“Are you talking of your destined wife?” asked the lady with a quiet smile.

"I am talking to you, and that conviction suffices to make me happy;—but we will change the subject of our discourse."

Lady Clara laughed: "If you shiver so prettily before marriage, at the very thought of the caring, what are you likely to do afterward?"

"Can you not guess? What do nine-tenths of the married men in town do? run away from home—find a thousand occupations elsewhere—do as they please, in short. But now, the case is far worse—though I am not bound like Jacob to serve seven years for my bride, there are, nevertheless, indispensable observances which make the milk of my human nature curdle most fearfully;—where the heart is a party, then indeed such observances become happiness, but I have outlived the agency of the heart."

"Reveillez-vous, mes beaux amours!" murmured Lady Clara, with a smile.

"Alas! they can awaken no more," replied Frank, in a tone of sentiment; "had they only faded with the roses of the season, I might have looked for them again with the return of spring; but they pillowed themselves upon diamonds, they fettered themselves with gold, and they have been chilled to death."

"Vastly pretty and poetical!" said Lady Clara; "most musical, most melancholy!"

"And most true. But I am forgiven now, am I not?" he asked, as his dark eyes looked tenderly into those of the lady, and he bent down to press her hand to his lips; "like Adam, when driven from Eden, I am going forth—think of me, dearest Lady Clara, in an hour hence; or rather, I would say, and run all risk of your calling me a coxcomb, think of me *for* an hour hence—I am going to—" he

paused, raised his eyes again steadily to hers, and laughed—"to woo!"—his laughter was echoed—"to be tender under the influence of champaign, and agreeable from the inspiration of turtle—to murmur sentiment about spaniels, to play propriety, to 'sigh like furnace,' and to become, in short, what is termed in the drama 'a walking gentleman,'—and I shall be eloquent, for I carry a talisman with me."

Frank pressed his hand gracefully on his heart; returned the whispered farewell of his hostess, and departed.

CHAPTER XIV.

HAD Miss Parsons cherished a doubt that Mr. Harcourt's search for a stray reel of cotton was a mere subterfuge, that doubt would have been removed when he appeared in a full suit of mourning two days afterward at the breakfast-table—positively mourning for Mr. Everard Wilkins! Now, as Miss Parsons mentally argued, if Mr. Harcourt did not consider himself identified with the Wilkinses, would he wear black for a person he never saw, belonging to a family with which he was not in any way connected? The good lady had no one to gainsay the validity of her conclusions; and consequently she decided in her own mind, and perfectly to her own satisfaction, that he certainly would not. There was however one ramification of the subject on which she could not bring herself to feel equally satisfied—she believed that she was

no favourite with Mr. Harcourt ; and with his influence over the mind of the widow, what would be the probable result to herself ? Expulsion from the family-circle, beyond all doubt, was her immediate and very uncomfortable conclusion,—uncomfortable, for harsh and arbitrary as Mrs. Wilkins certainly was, she had nevertheless become, as it were, a part of Miss Parsons's existence ; and the good things in her gift had by long use grown into absolute necessities with the worthy spinster. How Miss Parsons wished that the world did not contain very young men, handsome young men, and above all, needy young lawyers—how she wished that Mr. Frank Harcourt in particular had never been introduced by stupid Mr. Marsden in Baker-street, or that Mrs. Wilkins had been less susceptible. Here was the result of the turtle, and the café noir ! And the good lady wound up her cogitation by sighing to herself that very commonplace ejaculation—who would have thought it !

But Miss Parsons might have spared herself all these melancholy musings, for in becoming the husband of Mrs. Wilkins, the young barrister had no intention of becoming her companion also ; the situation of Miss Parsons had indeed, through his means, been a sinecure for the last few months, but the time was approaching when he would no longer encroach so largely on her privileges—Mr. Harcourt in the pursuit of a wealthy wife, and Mr. Harcourt in possession of seven thousand a-year, would be two very distinct individuals. It was a sad pity that the bridegroom *de jure* and the companion *de facto* could not conveniently come to a full understanding on this point—what hours of sad anticipation it would have saved poor Miss Parsons !

“ ‘ Happy they, the happiest of their kind
When gentle stars unite,’ ”—

murmured Frank, as he took the hand of Mrs. Wilkins to lead her to a seat, and then placed himself beside her: "I am an early visiter, my dear madam, but I trust nevertheless a welcome one—Miss Parsons, I'll trouble you to close that door at my back: I never can survive a draught."

"Confirmation strong" was this to the suspicions of Miss Parsons, but she closed the door in silence, and resumed her seat. Mr. Harcourt had hitherto waited upon himself, or employed a servant.

"I am flattered by your consideration," said Mrs. Wilkins, as she glanced at Frank's mourning habit.

"Consideration!—my dear Mrs. Wilkins, I esteemed it a duty not to appear before you otherwise than as I am; pray do not talk of consideration."

"Humph!" coughed Miss Parsons; but no one heeded her.

"You do not eat, Mr. Harcourt; you are not well," said the widow, anxiously, "is there any thing that I can procure which you would prefer to what is before you? I am always wretched when I see people refuse their breakfast."

"I desire nothing but what is before me," replied Frank, with emphasis, as he turned his eyes full upon the lady: "I *can* desire nothing more; but do not be wretched on my account; I am so perfectly the creature of feeling and impulse, that I cannot compel myself to any thing." He did not consider it necessary to mention, that in order to play off this pretty piece of sentiment with comfort to himself, he had previously breakfasted at home. "But you, my dear madam, you, who are so kindly susceptible of the well-being of others, you must allow me to forbid your being thus careless of yourself." Mrs. Wilkins was about to deprecate the idea of her appetite being more vigorous than his own, but the words were arrested on her lips by the termi-

nation of his address : " Remember, my kind friend, that we do not live only for ourselves ; there are cases where we are called upon to take care of our health for the sake of others to whom we are dear." And he concluded this exquisite theory by compelling the lady to its practice.

Meanwhile Miss Parsons dispensed tea and coffee, and was suffered to fast or feast as she pleased : the wretchedness of the hostess did not extend to her ; and as she wisely considered that it was as well to enjoy the good things of life while they were still attainable, she quietly went on with her meal, undisturbed by sentiment which she could not comprehend, and feelings which she had never experienced.

Breakfast was over ; and Mrs. Wilkins found fifty little commissions for Miss Parsons to execute — out-of-door commissions ; and it so chanced that the shops lay very wide of each other ; in fact, Miss Parsons, as she tied on her cloak, slipped her feet into her clogs, and clutched her umbrella, looked with some dismay at the clouds, which, like heavy curtains of black, seemed as though a touch would bring them down about her ears.

Frank smiled as she withdrew from the room : he glanced from the widow's sables to his own ; and could have laughed as he remembered that they were then about to enjoy one of those tête-à-têtes so coveted by lovers. He was at a loss how to commence the colloquy : and he sat for a while gazing upon the lady, and internally hoping that she would relieve him from his dilemma ; but no, there he sat, and there sat Mrs. Wilkins, her head averted, and her eyes fixed on Zoë, who was panting for breath, between heat and repletion, at her feet.

" This will never do ! " was his mental ejaculation : and edging his chair nearer to that of the lady,

he tenderly pressed her hand, and began in a deprecating tone, "Have I offended past forgiveness?—and was the tender solicitude which you expressed for my welfare merely intended to impose on a third person? Speak, my dear, my kind friend—speak, and assure me that I am needlessly tormenting myself."

"Offended!" murmured the lady; "why should you have offended?—surely you cannot have such a fear."

"But your silence—your averted eyes—"

"Do you wonder that I am silent, my dear Harcourt?—that in the very happiness of my heart at having won a love like yours, I rather shun your gaze?"

"Amiable candour!" sighed Frank; "how have I merited such a destiny!—and will you indeed be mine?—mine before the whole world? If a life of care and devotion can indeed repay the gift of this dear hand—"

"If it can repay it?" echoed the lady, with a tender smile; "what would it not repay? can any thing in this life bear comparison with a pure and disinterested affection?"

"I should think not," said Frank; but he was by no means certain of the fact.

"I shall place all that I possess unhesitatingly in your hands, my dear Frank; I should be unworthy of your preference did I withhold any thing from your generous devotedness. My own wants are few; my own tastes are simple:—in these respects I feel that you resemble me."

"Wonderfully!" ejaculated the young barrister.

"There is one point on which I may as well consult you at once. Miss Parsons has become inquisitive and taciturn of late; would it not be as well to let her visit her friends? She has been

with me nineteen years, and during that time she has never left me for a day : I could not spare her : I was an isolated being—and the dogs, too, they required attendance ; but now I shall not miss her in your dear society, and Harrison shall be for a time my master of the hounds.” Mrs. Wilkins laughed at the conceit ; so did Frank ; but he nevertheless had no wish to see Miss Parsons depart from Baker-street, and leave the widow wholly on his hands : no, no ;—that would never do ; and he had a shrewd suspicion that when once the companion had left her present home, it was never intended that she should return to it. Frank, however, had decided otherwise : Miss Parsons would be as necessary to his establishment after his marriage as the hall lamp. She must be the safety-valve for the lady’s ill-humour. Who would listen to her complaints of club-houses, her murmurings against routs, and operas, and races, and sailing-parties, if Miss Parsons were dismissed ? To whom could she unfold her disappointment and her griefs, if the patient, the practised companion, were not at her side to listen ?

All this flashed across the mental vision of Frank with the speed and force of electricity : his wife would see so little of him that she must have some one with her to preserve her from the attacks of the blue devils ; her venting her anger upon him was so totally out of the question, that some obliging individual must be paid for enduring it : and who could be so well calculated for the post of honour as she who had so long and so patiently filled the situation ?

“Nay, nay, do not discard poor Miss Parsons just at the moment when she may be made so very useful,” said Frank ; “there are ten thousand little services which she will perform to admiration ; and

thereby save you a world of thought. You will be worn to death if you have to arrange every thing for everybody: I will positively not hear such a scheme talked of: if Miss Parsons has lived for nineteen years without seeing her friends, her sensibilities must be pretty well stagnant by this time, and she will not suffer from a prolonged separation."

"As you please," replied Mrs. Wilkins; "it is a matter of so little importance that there is no merit in ceding the point."

How wayward is human nature! How often do we sigh for that of which the very prospect of possession afterward inspires dread! It was thus with Frank. If he had, while he considered the hand of the widow unattainable, suffered himself at times to dwell on certain deficiencies both of mind and manner,—how much more palpable did they become, how much more frequent and glaring did they appear, when he reflected how soon he would be called upon to blush for them in the person of his wife!—his wife!! And was this to be the termination of all his mental sketches of Mrs. Frank Harcourt? Of the loved one who was to be pillowed on his heart, and guarded as the apple of his eye? Yes, truly, the important words were said—the decision was made—his fate was decided. Verily, Frank Harcourt, it was a pill which required gilding!

How very seldom does our after-life embody forth the bright visions of our youth!—persons, places, circumstances, all alike fail in their turn to fill up the outline sketched by our young fancy: or, if indeed they sometimes do so, it is with such deep and fearful shades that we scarcely recognise our original idea. Perhaps it is better thus, for youth is a wayward theorist; and the poetry of early life would blend but badly with the realities of the

world. If every heart could inhabit its own Eden, society and social usages must stagnate ; and worse than all, we should forget that we are mere travellers in a strange land ; and, instead of following the highway leading to our destined country, we should one and all turn aside from the path, to linger in sunny spots more congenial to our tastes ; or loiter idly among flowers and perfumes, until that night on which morning rises no more should overtake us in our wanderings, and find us unable to pursue our proper course. Many of us have an ingenious method of rendering the path of life narrower and more tortuous than it really is by embracing fantastic and empty imaginations of our own,—holding a veil before the sun which is willing to shine upon us,—and, to use a homely simile, going through every kennel the longest way. Frank was one of these : as he left Baker-street he began to commiserate his own fate. Young, handsome, and ambitious, his aspiring nature had served him no farther than to win for him the love of Mrs. Wilkins ! He dwelt not on his own determined agency, but he amused himself by cursing his unlucky stars that Fortune had done no more for him. When he endeavoured to reflect only upon the advantages of his position, he found it impossible not to recur to the penalties which were attached to it : like a paper kite, he no sooner soared into the clouds, than the unlucky string drew him back again to earth.

CHAPTER XV.

"UPON my veracity, Lancaster, you are playing your cards very badly : if Lady Clara is so soon to have an attentif, you have a prior right to be the man : only last Saturday you left her box as though you felt that you were *de trop*, and that Mr. Somebody, who is no one knows who, and who comes from no one knows where, had the game in his own hands."

"He was welcome to it," was the laconic reply.

"He's a handsome fellow," pursued Lovell ; "that must be admitted on all hands ; but the intimacy is certainly a very remarkable one.—I wonder Nichols does not interfere."

"I understand he is Nichols's bosom friend," yawned Lord Lancaster.

A general laugh followed the remark.

"It looks extremely like it, certainly," said Neville ; "I called the other morning as soon as I was off guard, with some new music that I had promised to Lady Clara : she was denied ; but Harcourt's cab was at the door, and the puppy had the assurance to nod to me from the very steps as he walked into the hall, without asking a question."

"A lesson for *you*, Neville," said Lovell, dryly ; "always hold your tongue, and take every thing for granted : if you once begin to ask questions, it's all over with you. Harcourt was determined that Lady Clara should be at home, and at home she accordingly was—to *him*. You gave her the oppor-

tunity of deciding for herself, and you were shut out : the inference is palpable."

"I never held my tongue in my life," said Lord George Luttrell; "I always said what I thought from a boy—it's a bore not to say what you think, isn't it? I remember some years ago that I had an old maiden aunt, Lady Winifrid Wetherall, as rich as Cræsus, and as ugly as Charybdis,—she always said I was very candid—liked me for it—great bore when people don't always like you for the same thing, isn't it? One day she asked me what the world thought of her—told her directly. She died soon after—great bore for her to die just then, for she hadn't time to forgive me,—left her money to endow an hospital—tore up her first will, and disinherited me. Great bore!—have hated old maids ever since—no wonder, is it?"

"Another illustration of my theory," said Lovell: "though I started it on very slight grounds, Luttrell has at once strengthened my position. Depend upon it, there are many accomplishments much less difficult of attainment than learning when to hold your tongue; yes, and there is as decidedly and as unquestionably great self-denial in practising the art when known. A few ill-judged and ill-timed words have frequently marred a man's fortunes, both morally, socially, and politically; lost him his mistress or his election; and taught him a lesson which he has remembered throughout existence. How commonly do we hear the exclamation—'oh, that I had but held my tongue!'—How seldom do we profit by having heard it!"

"Lovell is quite oracular," whispered Lord Lancaster.

"I have earned the privilege of being so on this point," said Lovell; "I paid pretty dearly for the lesson."

"Let us have the proof," exclaimed Neville, "and you shall be free to prose another hour by the clock."

"Ten minutes will suffice. Some years ago I put up for — : I was tolerably sure of my election, for I had agreed to pay a round sum for the honour of representing the 'free and independent electors' of that distinguished borough in parliament. When I arrived in the town, they gave me a dinner ; and the mayor introduced me to the corporation, and the corporation introduced me to the freemen ; and I presented them with a fat buck, and they very condescendingly accepted of it : and the mayor proposed my health, and made a speech, setting forth my perfect fitness for the senate and the council ; and I returned thanks, and made another, in which I perfectly coincided in all the sentiments and opinions of the worthy and intelligent chief magistrate : and the good people of — were delighted with me, and with my modesty and my oratory, and the liberal price which I had consented to pay for the privilege of calling them my constituents : we were mutually pleased, and

'All went merry as a marriage bell.'

But the hours sped on—the mayor was a bachelor ; and we drank more wine, and made more speeches ; and the less sober we became, the more determined we were to be oratorical : and it so chanced that at length, overcome by ambition and bad claret, I rose once again to speak, and I did speak ! somewhat confusedly, no doubt, but, nevertheless, only too intelligibly. I had, in the hilarity of the table, suffered the point of my situation totally to escape me ; my principles (for I *had* principles, though I

then sacrificed them to expediency) were strongly in favour of purity of election. I spoke as I felt—I discoursed volubly and earnestly for full half an hour on bribery and corruption, venal representation, and the enormity of rotten boroughs! Mayor, aldermen, and electors, all stood, or rather sat, aghast: my speech was honoured at its conclusion, like the toasted memory of a dead monarch, with solemn silence; and I believe that I ultimately fell prostrate on my laurels,—for shortly afterward I was carried home to my hotel to bed.”

“And what was the result?”

“Just such as might have been anticipated: I rose the next day with heavy eyes and throbbing temples, and just crawled down to the Town Hall in time to hear my opponent, Jeremy Slender, Esquire, whom I had outbidden for the borough, unanimously elected.”

A volley of laughter succeeded the narration.

“The joke is a good one, doubtless,” said Lovell; “nevertheless, had I known when to hold my tongue, I should have secured my seat.”

“Your mischance reminds me of an anecdote,” said Neville, “with which I will strengthen your theory. When I was at Oxford, the Professor of Oratory was Mr. C****. One of the conditions annexed to this professorship is, as you are aware, celibacy: nevertheless Mr. C**** wooed and won a fair lady, whose attractions were too great for his prudence; but the worthy professor did not call upon his academical friends to inform them of what he had done; on the contrary, he quietly pursued his usual routine of duty, and during four years his marriage remained unsuspected: at length the circumstance transpired, and an official personage waited upon him to ascertain the fact. ‘Mr. C****,’ said the somewhat unwelcome visitor, ‘I under-

stand that you are married, and have been for some time.'

"The professor bowed.

"Pray, sir, how, after taking such a step, has it occurred that you have held your professorship?"

"Simply," was the reply, 'because I have held my tongue.'

"The anecdote is a good one," observed Lovell.

"And authentic," said the guardsman.

"I have no doubt of it; and it is but one instance among many of the truth of my position. There are men who affect to think that all earthly wisdom consists in a set of well-assorted phrases and startling opinions,—but I maintain that there may be even more wisdom in knowing when to hold your tongue."

"What a pity it is that our club does not boast a reporter," said Neville: "really we are quite edifying this morning."

"I'm very glad it doesn't," remarked Lord George, with a self-gratulating nod; "great bore to have all one's remarks registered in black and white—one can't always talk for print; and then one looks so devilish silly on paper."

"But you, Luttrell, who are always ready to 'point a moral and adorn a tale,'" said Lovell, "you have no cause to deprecate the interference of the swift-fingered stenographers."

"It's hard upon a good many individuals, though," said the lordling, compassionately: "Lancaster, for instance, who's a bad talker—it would be a great bore for him."

"Not a whit," laughed Lovell; "the splendour of his sentences compensates for their scarcity: it is your piebald conversationists who would be the sufferers—your men of pet words and silly phrases."

Lord George looked pleased: he was one of

those unlucky individuals who are always pleased in the wrong place; and he laughed *with* those who were laughing *at* him, in his own peculiar anti-sensible way.

"Got a lame horse," said the lordling, after a pause sufficiently long to enable him to seize a new idea; "can't go out of town, though the governor has written to say that I'm wanted in Hertfordshire—obliged to see Raffle three times a day, for fear he should be neglected—great bore to have a good horse neglected, isn't it?" As he asked the question, Lord George was particularly attracted by his own reflection in an opposite glass, and he continued without waiting for a reply—"Grimsley may say what he likes about Nugee, but after all Buckmaster's the man for a waistcoat—a great deal depends on the waistcoat,—bore to have an ill-made waistcoat." There was the silence of a second, and then he concluded by saying, "Very difficult to get a match—don't know of a match, any of you, do you?"

"What do you want?" asked Lovell, looking quietly up from a newspaper which he held in his hand; "is it a wife or a waistcoat?"

"Not a wife," said Lancaster; "there he could never meet with a match; 'none but himself can be his parallel,'—*le monde ne contient pas de quoi*!"

"Not a waistcoat," followed up Neville; "for he said yesterday that he had one for every day in the year—like Fonthill Beckford's porcelain breakfast-cups."

"A horse, a horse," broke in Lord George; "a match for Raffle—I'm going to start a mail phaeton—I'm sick of cabs; tailors go out now-a-days in cabs to take measures—great bore to be taken for a tailor."

"Very great bore," responded Lovell; "now I

run no such risk, for I'm never sufficiently well-dressed; it is quite another thing with you."

"Harcourt is one of the best dressed men in town," said Neville; "I have often remarked it—always fitted to an inch."

"I suspect that he is just now," remarked Lovell, in his peculiar manner.

"Revenons à nos moutons," laughed Lancaster, from the sofa.

"Still harping on my daughter," followed up the guardsman.

"O—h!" ejaculated Lord George, like Kemble taking Macready's joke, when the smile had left the lips of his companions; "you mean Lady Clara—great bore to have such a wife."

"As how?" asked Lovell.

Lord George was posed for a moment; for though he sometimes knew what he meant, he could very seldom express it: "So soon after marriage, you know."

"To have such a wife so soon after marriage?" repeated Lovell, inquiringly.

"Yes, flirting, and all that kind of thing"—Lord George had just caught another idea by the tail,—
"preparing for her appearance at Doctors' Commons."

"Fy, fy; 'no scandal about Queen Elizabeth' I hope," exclaimed the guardsman; "a pure Platonist!"

"C'est le metier des femmes," drawled Lancaster.

"I'll bet a hundred to ten that she starts with Harcourt," said Lord George. A bet is always an Englishman's method of bolstering up a shallow argument, or supporting a defective position.

No one spoke.

"A hundred to five," repeated the lordling.

"A safe bet—we're none of us young enough,"

said Neville, as he drew on his gloves; "every editor of a morning paper has the important paragraph ready written by this time."

And with this concluding compliment to the propriety and prudence of their common friend, the parties separated.

CHAPTER XVI.

"I must be permitted to remark," observed the Countess of Blacksley, in that tone

"As who shall say, 'I am Sir Oracle,
And when I ope my lips let no dog bark'"—

"I must be permitted to remark that the sacrifices which my niece Lady Clara Nichols has made should entitle her, and moreover certainly do entitle her, to make a stand on this point."

"I am at a loss to understand the nature of those sacrifices, I confess," said Nichols, quietly, as he glanced round the apartment.

"You are obtuse, sir," sneered the countess; "has she not sacrificed her rank in life—has she not lost caste?"

"Really, madam," replied the husband, who had become sufficiently inured to those needle-pointed sarcasms, which from their constant recurrence at length merely pricked, having lost their power to wound; "I am so utterly wearied by all the cant of caste, and rank, and exclusiveness, that I now hold it at its proper price; and you must pardon me if I assure you that it is a very paltry one."

"Mr. Nichols brings every thing to the same

test," remarked Lady Clara; "he has a mental ledger, and an intellectual day-book."

"This is from the point, however," resumed Lady Blacksley; "let us understand the thing at once. Do you, or do you not mean, Mr. Nichols, to leave to my niece and Lord Somerville's daughter the full liberty of action?"

"I mean to leave to your ladyship's niece and to my wife, only such liberty of action as shall be respectable for her, and satisfactory to myself—"

"Respectable!" echoed Lady Clara, with a shrug, and a glance at her aunt.

"Yes, madam, I repeat the word, respectable: it is one, the meaning of which, if I am to credit the common gossip of the clubs, you are rapidly forgetting; I know not how far such may be the privilege of a peer's daughter, but it is in no degree that of a citizen's wife. If you merit the light tone and the lighter words in which you are now mentioned, I am, in some points, perhaps, the person to blame; should the tone become more decided, and the words less guarded, yours shall be the fault. Once for all, we must understand each other: Joseph Nichols may have been a weak, but he will never be a good-natured husband!"

"You run no risk of such an implication."

"I am glad of it: be assured that should the designation be applied to me, it will prove a misnomer."

"And your resolution is, that Lady Clara shall leave town, now, in the height of the season?" said Lady Blacksley, half-interrogatively; "may I inquire what reason she is to advance for such a proceeding?"

"Her desire to oblige me, if she be at a loss for a better."

Lady Clara laughed bitterly. "Such a reason

would be inadmissible, from the simple fact of its gaining no credence. Shall I write myself a simpleton?"

"As you please."

"Understand, Mr. Nichols," she resumed, impatiently; "that if—mark you, I say *if* I consent to this antipodean arrangement, I shall remunerate myself for the sacrifice; I shall fill my house with guests, never stir without four horses, and make your establishment the wonder and the gaze of the county."

"I can countenance no such empty and idle follies; I owe a duty to the neighbourhood which I will fulfil; while, as certainly, I will not suffer the scum of—but I am wrong to adopt a bitterness of tone where the subject is so unworthy of emotion. I appear harsh, dictatorial; I am sorry that such a necessity is thrust upon me; and I have not yet lost the hope that we may still learn to think alike on these points."

"Never!" said Lady Clara, vehemently; "and it is well that I have been forewarned of the state of exile to which you had destined me; but you are deceived, sir, in your estimate of my forbearance;—do you think that I married to be shut up for hours with you tête-à-tête in a gloomy country place?—do you think that I could do it?—What have we in common?"

"Nothing," said Nichols, placidly.

"The idea is preposterous!" ejaculated the countess, disdainfully: "inouie! barbarous! If you are determined to go, Mr. Nichols, why, go you must; but Lady Clara does not wish to leave town."

"Say, madam, is resolved not to leave town," interposed her niece.

"Then the affair is decided," said the countess, with perfect sang froid.

"It is," acquiesced Nichols: and turning towards his wife, whose cheek was yet flushed, he added gravely, "But remember, Clara, that should you one day look back upon the arrangement of this hour with regret, it is of your own making; heaven is my witness how little I have sought—how little I had foreseen such an utter wrenching asunder of every tie between us—"

Lady Clara looked up inquiringly, and the countess interposed with an uneasy laugh; "One would really imagine that you were going to turn hermit, Mr. Nichols, and live and die among the oaks and elms."

"No, madam, I have no such design; but I shall carry away with me the consciousness of having no longer a home: of having forfeited all chance of ever possessing one; I shall know that the brand is on me, and that I am fated to wander unloved and unloving through the crowd of life—I can never be fooled twice. If Lady Clara and myself part in our present spirit, in that spirit only shall we ever meet again. She may share alike my purse and my name, but those are the only things which we shall ever again have in common. I am now fully awakened from the dream which has so long deluded me, and I am not one to be misled twice by the same phantasy. If, on the contrary, she is willing even now to see the justice of my determination, and to submit to it, I will be the first to bury the past in oblivion. It is for her to decide."

"Submit! determination!" echoed Lady Clara, roused from her temporary astonishment; "these are most matrimonial words, it must be confessed—new to my ears, and not more new than disagreeable. I have never yet learned to submit, and

I am unlikely now to study the art. Your ladyship will concede, I am sure, that Mr. Nichols adopts a novel method of persuasion: one as high-bred as it is conciliatory."

The countess shrugged her shoulders, and moved towards the window.

Mr. Nichols also rose from his seat, and approaching his wife, he addressed her in a tone of cold courtesy, through which a slight sadness was at times perceptible, though he struggled to suppress it:—"Pass over the ill-chosen terms which have so disgusted you, Lady Clara; there was little occasion for me to deepen your scorn by words; my life has been one of such uneventful character, I have been so long accustomed to unvarnished honesty of speech, that perhaps I am somewhat deficient in the worldly tact which spreads a smooth surface over the roughness of original meaning—I will word my expostulation anew, and willingly; for, believe me, it is not easy to stand by with a quiet pulse, to contemplate the subversion of your dearest hopes. We have probably both been self-deceived: our anticipations have been suffered to outrun our reason: our eyes are now partially opened; but shall we, therefore, throw from us our still-remaining prospect of domestic peace?"

"Domestic peace is the chimera of young ladies and gentlemen in their teens," flippantly interposed Lady Clara: "we are beyond its influence."

"I fear we are," replied Nichols, with a sigh, which proved the utterness of his conviction of the fact. "Yet if there were still a chance, however remote, however slight—but I will hope that there is one—Lady Clara, for my sake, for your own—nay, do not smile in scorn at the appeal; for remember that the world is adder-tongued, and even when the wound is cicatrized, the poison remains—"

for both our sakes, then, pause ere you determine to turn that tongue upon each of us ; it is a sneer and a jest now—bitter enough to bear even thus ! but should it deepen, it will be a jest no longer ; it will be a blight, a polluting breath which will poison the very springs of existence—trust me, ill-fame is as the Upas-tree, which withers all within its influence.”

“ You romance, sir.”

“ No, Lady Clara—I am too sick at heart to romance. Once more I warn you that if we now part, it will be for ever.”

“ I have friends, sir—firm friends ; I have a home : neither will fail me, to humour the caprice of the man whom I have been unhappy enough to make my husband.”

“ As you will, madam—you are then resolved ?”

“ I have not yet said so ; I have been talked down—overwhelmed with words—”

“ Surely, Clara, after such a conversation you cannot hesitate,” broke in the countess.

“ Your ladyship is premature,” was the reply ; “ there are other preliminaries to arrange ; Mr. Nichols will be polite enough to remember that I cannot be left—since to leave me is his lordly will !—a beggar.”

Nichols started—the truth flashed upon him ; this scene had indeed been anticipated ; he cursed the law of separate maintenance ; he felt that he had been duped, but he restrained himself, and Lady Clara spoke again.

“ There is another little fact also which it may be necessary to recall ;”—she paused, and raised her eyes steadily and defyingly to his face—“ I have a father, and a brother—they are not obscure individuals to be elbowed aside : they will ask, and they must be answered ; they will probably demand why Mr. Joseph Nichols abandons his wife—”

"I will tell them at once, madam," said Nichols, cutting short the taunt; "simply because his wife has so willed it—because she thought it a pity that a praiseworthy and provident arrangement made at her marriage should not be acted upon—because—shall I complete my reply?" he asked with sudden sternness; but the eye of Lady Clara sank under his excited and indignant glance, and she remained silent. "Now, then, we thoroughly comprehend each other," he resumed, after the pause of a second: "we can consequently speak plainly. I shall not shrink nor quail under any questioning; and I shall rejoice to hear that you, Lady Clara, and those who have been your counsellors, abide the world's scrutiny with equal calmness."

"I beg it to be distinctly understood, that I use no interference whatever in the affair," observed the countess.

"That explanation your ladyship must condescend to make to the world," said Nichols, dryly: "it will not be altogether unnecessary."

Lady Blacksley bit her lip, and would have replied, but she was strangely at a loss for words.

"I shall, of course, mention this conversation to my father," said Lady Clara, in a tone of less arrogance than that in which she had hitherto spoken: "he must decide for me."

Nichols bowed: "I leave town on Wednesday week." He remained for an instant standing silently beside his wife, but she made no rejoinder; and, anxious to terminate a conversation which had saddened as well as disgusted him, he shortly afterward left the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

"*Toujours perdrix !*" murmured Frank to himself, as he sprang from his cabriolet, threw the reins to his groom, and entered the hall-door of Mrs. Wilkins ; "really any thing for a change—that is, any thing *pleasant*—would be quite a relief ;—I must get married at once, or I shall never be able to stand it :—making love to a woman of seventy is decidedly the modern illustration of the mythological image of drawing water in a sieve—one's best ideas, one's prettiest metaphors fall still-born, even after one is half-choked with the enormity of their utterance—and yet"—thus Harcourt continued to soliloquize as he ascended the stairs more leisurely than usual—"after all, so that the money be forthcoming, and the means of enjoyment with it, the difference between a young wife and an old one, like that in the weight of the live and dead fish with which Charles the Second hoaxed the wiseacres of the Royal Society, is merely ideal ! So courage, Frank ;—and now for the widow !"

The door of the well-known apartment yielded to his touch, and yet he stood at the threshold an instant ere he entered. The room had but one occupant, and that one was not Mrs. Wilkins. The opening of the door had aroused from a revery, evidently a distressing one, for the tears yet rested on her cheek, a young and lovely female. She was dressed in the deepest mourning, and a shade of sadness, too decided for her years, clouded her fair white brow.

As her eye met that of Harcourt, it flashed proudly ; and she rose from her seat, and hastily

brushed away the tears which she felt were profaned by his unwelcome gaze. The start, the recognition, were mutual : but not so the feeling which succeeded that recognition. The blood had mantled the brow of Harcourt almost as deeply as her own ; but no shame mingled with the surprise which was so visible in his countenance—in an instant he saw and felt that he was remembered—and the heartless libertine almost believed that remembrance to be a triumph, even coupled, as it must be in the mind of the fair young creature before him, with the memory of insult and alarm. Yes, *she* was indeed before him who had haunted his thoughts in despite of all his efforts to forget her—standing timidly and tremblingly, though her proud and disdainful look might have cheated one less world-worn than himself into the belief that she met him without other feelings than those of cold, unmitigated scorn ; but there was a quiver in the lip, and a drooping of the eyelid, as his gaze met hers steadily, almost triumphantly, that told all her fear, her helplessness, to the practised and calculating eye of Harcourt. Who can she be ? and how came she here ? were the questions which he mentally asked himself in the brief interval during which they stood face to face in silence. There was a shade of defiance rapidly gathering on either brow : with Agnes it was the timid defiance of insulted feminine purity ; with Harcourt it was that of a bold, reckless, impassioned libertine. The injured are usually those who suffer the most deeply in a chance encounter with the individuals who have injured them : it was so here. Harcourt was the first to recover his self-possession, but his position was nevertheless one of sufficient difficulty, for as yet he knew not under what circumstances his beautiful incognita had been added to the family circle of his betrothed wife—

that she *was* added to the family circle was abundantly evident ; she was surrounded by the thousand little articles so indispensable to a lady's work-table—her appearance, her dress, the perfect arrangement of her fine dark hair, all betrayed the fact of her domestication ; there was none of the flutter, the partial disarray, the restlessness of recent arrival about her : she was calm, and cold, and collected. Could she be an honoured and a cherished guest ? She looked too timid, too terror-stricken by the arrival of another who was unwelcome to her ; too uncertain, as it seemed, of the extent of her own power of action, to feel herself "the observed of all observers," which from her beauty she must necessarily have been, had not some yoke bowed her young spirit. Could she be a dependant ? He almost hated himself for the suspicion as he looked on the high, proud brow, mantled by the rich blood of indignant recollection.—Still she *did* recollect : and on the faith of that worse than equivocal consciousness, he at length spoke.

"Do not suffer me to disturb you, madam : pray resume your seat ; I am unused to be treated as a stranger in this house. And from *you*,"—the emphasis brought the blood in deeper volumes to the cheek of Agnes,—"*from you* I should doubly deprecate all ceremonious observances."

"I owe you none, sir, ceremonious or otherwise," faltered Miss Davenel, making a violent effort to subdue at once the easy self-possession of Harcourt ; "I rose from my chair simply because I would not condescend to sit near one who, when he has chanced to occupy my thoughts, has ever done so as an object of disgust and avoidance."

"That is a feeling to which I am so perfectly unaccustomed from your sex, madam," said Frank, in an accent of pique, "that its very novelty will re-

commend it ; but, if my memory serve me, there should be another object, doubtless of disgust and avoidance as well as myself, blended with your reminiscences of my unworthy person. Nay, never blush, madam,—with so unexceptionable an introduction, you must have felt quite consoled by his protection and support.”

Agnes preserved the silence of bitter emotion.

“I have really some right to complain,” pursued Frank, who felt that he had to contend with a very unequal adversary, as he stood with a half-mocking smile, rocking to and fro the chair on the back of which he was leaning, until his companion should resume her seat. “I do not see why a fair lady should discard a true knight, to smile upon an adventurer—but all that is now gone by ; and if, as I suspect and hope, we are to meet frequently beneath this roof, I will promise to forget and forgive, like a well-disposed young gentleman, and we will shake hands and be friends.” And as he terminated this harangue, Harcourt had the audacity to extend his hand to the orphan.

“Never, sir !” exclaimed Agnes, as she looked her heart’s scorn on the excited young man ; “never shall my hand be polluted by your touch. It may indeed be desirable for *you* to forget all that once passed between us—it is ever desirable to escape the consciousness of shame—but do not dream, sir, that *I* shall ever forget ; from *your* lips only have I been fated to hear the words of insult, and be assured that I shall remember them till my dying day.”

“As you please, madam,” said Frank, as he thought how much more beautiful his incognita looked under the influence of indignation ; “then we are to be foes, is it not so ? to sleep in our harness like knights on a crusade, and be ever ready to

do battle ; we are likely, should my conjecture prove correct, to have a very stirring time of it. You are provided with a squire ; I have one to seek—but I do not despair ; the trottoir, you know, madam, is prolific in such personages. Have you ever related that one little passage in your history to our worthy hostess ? If not, it will make an excellent story for the evening hearth."

Agnes involuntarily started : in an instant the thought how such a narrative, deepened and broadened by the lips of a man like the one before her, would be received by her stern and cold-hearted protectress, flashed across her mind ; and she felt all the wretched dependence of her present position with tenfold bitterness.

Frank instantly saw his advantage, and remorselessly pursued it : " Do not let any consideration for me induce you to withhold the communication, I entreat ; for our good friend Mrs. Wilkins will fully comprehend the probability of a young man volunteering to make the acquaintance of a pretty woman walking alone in the streets of London,—it will be an excellent excuse also for improving our acquaintance, as it will prove to her that we are not entirely strangers to each other—in short, it will do an infinity of good. She will be delighted with the naïveté of the incident, and love us both the better for our candour. Is it not an excellent idea ?"

Agnes did not reply ; she could not. She stood silently before him, with the tear of insulted feeling, and the blush of offended modesty, struggling for mastery. The position of the intruder in the family of Mrs. Wilkins she could not define, but she fearfully felt that it must be that of one who knew well his own influence, or he had not dared to put on so bold a front, and to insult any individual beneath her roof.

"You are silent, madam," resumed Frank, after a short interval. "Will you intrust the tale to *my* telling? I will do no dishonour to the adventure. I will dilate on the beauty of the fair pedestrian—on the enormity of the idle 'young man about town' who ventured to address her in the words of compliment—and on the prowess of the gallant young hero who threw down his gauntlet in defiance; the tale shall not lose in the telling, or my name is not Frank Harcourt."

"If such be indeed the name which you have disgraced," said Agnes, "I trust that it may never more offend my ear. If I shrank beneath the bold intrusive insult, which is my first memory of the individual who wears that name, I doubly scorn the mean, unmanly taunts with which I must now connect it. I leave you, sir; I hope it may be to repent the wrong."

As Agnes spoke, she moved proudly to the door; which Frank, foreseeing her purpose, and resolved to convince her of his perfect consciousness of the importance which she attached to her secret, sprang forward, and opened for her with a profound bow of overacted deference; and without the interchange of another word between them, she gained the solitude of her chamber.

Miss Davenel had scarcely left the room ere the wayward spirit of Harcourt led him to accuse himself, not of a want of generosity, but of weakness, in his conduct during the late interview; he blamed himself for a deficiency of tact, when a failure in temper only was the origin of his error; as he looked on the orphan, the memory of his mortification came bitterly across him, and he yielded to its influence. As soon as she had withdrawn, he remembered his uncertainty with regard to her position in the house of Mrs. Wilkins; and he remem-

bered also, that by his own rash conduct he was probably depriving himself of all future chance of winning the forgiveness and favour of the loveliest girl upon whom it had ever been his fortune to look. Frank had certainly never shown less self-possession. It is a curious fact that wounded vanity is the most unmanageable of all feelings; we may suppress contempt—we may conceal dislike—we may veil indifference—we may forgive injury—but touch our vanity, and we recoil from the pressure, as though it probed a wound—mortify it, and the sting festers for ever. Perhaps Harcourt was even unusually morbid on this point, as only in that one solitary instance had he smarted beneath the feeling; certain it is, that the recollection over-mastered him; but now he could almost have blushed when he remembered the wantonness of his insulting language to the pale and gentle girl who had just quitted him; he felt, he even avowed to himself, that the attack had been unworthy alike of a man and of a gentleman—and then—the policy of the proceeding was so undeniably, so palpably bad! The second consideration was worse than the first: a few gentle words of apology, a flattering and fluttered affectation of self-abasement, a sigh or two, and a promise of amendment for the future, might set *that* to rights—*might*! must—for was she not a woman? “Yes, yes,” murmured Frank, complacently:—

“She is a woman, therefore to be wooed;
She is a woman, therefore to be won—”

But his uncompromising, his triumphant levity had perhaps led her at once from his presence to that of Mrs. Wilkins; nay, even now while he was lying stretched along the sofa, speculating on the probable

effects of his late intemperate folly, those effects might be already in operation!—the thought was not to be borne. In five minutes he had persuaded himself that it must be so, or why was not the widow even now beside him? Her absence was unusual: she had hitherto always anticipated his arrival! “Better to know the worst at once,” ejaculated Frank, as he sprang from the sofa, and pulled the bell with an energy which threatened to alarm the whole household.

“The worst of what?” asked a well-known voice close to him, and he turned to meet the extended hand of Mrs. Wilkins. A servant obeyed the noisy summons, and was dismissed, which gave Frank time to collect himself for a reply.

“Nay, my dear Mrs. Wilkins,” he said, in that tone of deprecating tenderness which he knew so well how to assume when it was likely to serve him with the sex: “what think you, save thoughts of yourself, could so deeply move me? I have had a dream—a vision of idle import, but it is over now: you are beside me—well, charming, with a bright smile and a kind tone; and the clouds of fancy are dispersed by your presence as by a fairy wand. But you have played truant sadly to-day, I have been—let me see—yes, at least ten minutes in the house.”

“And alone?” asked the lady, suddenly.

“Not all the time;—there was a—” Frank glanced at the darkening brow of the widow, and comprehended his position in an instant; “a young person in the room when I arrived; hemming a shred of muslin, I believe; but she disappeared, and left me to my reflections.”

“Very proper,” said Mrs. Wilkins, “I am glad she knows so well how to conduct herself. I am really sorry, my dear Harcourt, to have to request

your forbearance for this additional encumbrance ; but the girl is distantly related to me, and having been left destitute, I thought I could not in common decency let her starve ; and accordingly I have promised to take care of her."

"Entirely destitute, did you say?" asked Harcourt, with a peculiar feeling which he could not have explained even to himself.

"Perfectly so : and under these circumstances, I thought if I could in any way make her useful in the house, she would be less expense here than elsewhere."

"Admirably judged !" said Frank, with a suppressed smile, "and now perhaps you will permit me to suggest an arrangement ; I think I understood you to say, my dear Mrs. Wilkins, that Miss Parsons wished to visit her family—poor thing !—such a wish is very natural and praiseworthy ; and it appears to me that this would be an excellent opportunity of indulging her, while this—what is the young person's name ?"

"Agnes Davenel," said the widow.

"While this Miss Agnes Davenel supplies her place. Need I hint that curious eyes are by no means desirable to either of us in our present position, my dear Mrs. Wilkins?" and as he spoke, Frank raised the hand of the lady to his lips, and she mistook the smile of self-gratulation at his secret hopes for one of tenderness towards herself: "If this Miss Davenel must become your inmate, we can fairly dispense with Miss Parsons:—how say you, my dear madam, do you approve of my suggestion?"

"Can I do otherwise?" replied the widow: "when I know that a delicate consideration for my feelings has induced you to make it? It is an ex-

cellent thought. Miss Parsons shall go—that is decided, and Agnes Davenel shall supply her place as far as she is capable of doing so : but I do not think she will ever be half so useful. She is willing to do any thing, but a sharp word drowns her in tears, and the very name of her parents sends her to her chamber weeping like a school-girl. Absurd, to bring up a girl, who is absolutely a beggar, with such silly ideas ! She could not have finer feelings, nor more sentimental whims, if she had ten thousand a year. She must learn to get over all this ; but she was brought up by a silly old grandmother, as melancholy and as proud as herself, and it will take time to cure her of all her fancies. I can only determine never to attend to any of her complaints, but to let her get on as well as she can : and having in that way done my duty by her, I must trust to chance for the rest.”

“A very wise resolution,” said Frank, with affected sententiousness : “girls have so many whims that it is quite impossible to attend to them. For my own part, I shall never pay the least attention to the fancies of any poor relation ; and if you, my dear friend, consult your own happiness and peace of mind, you will never listen to any folly of a diseased and morbid imagination.”

Harcourt spoke earnestly, for he *was* in earnest—yet he was not rightly understood : nor did he intend to be so—his fancy was running riot : he had the hand of his betrothed bride in his, and he was dreaming wild and worthless dreams, and drawing from her confiding though foolish affection his most tangible hopes of their realization.

“I have just left her in her room,” pursued the unsuspecting widow : “she is weeping, silently it is true, but as bitterly as though she had not a good

home—I cannot help thinking that there is a lover in the case.” Frank started, and became all attention—“A young man brought her here.”

“Some adventurer,” said Harcourt, with a bitter sneer.

“Very possibly,” was the reply. “But be he whom he may, I have forbidden him the house; I detest every thing of the sort; I will not lend myself to the degradation of some pauper marriage, and be cheated out of my reason by tales of love, and affection, and so forth.”

Frank felt as though he could have choked.

“But we have talked enough of this strange girl,” said Mrs. Wilkins, after a pause: “I’m sure I wish she had died in her cradle with her foolish mother; fine ladies without sixpence are an intolerable nuisance—but you will bear with her for my sake, my dear Harcourt, will you not? I will take care that to you she shall conduct herself with the respect and deference which are your due, or she shall not long enjoy a home in my house.”

“Do not distress me by such an appeal, my best friend; for your dear sake, Agnes Davenel shall be an object of my especial interest,” said Frank, gently. “Fear not, we shall soon show her the fallacy of such idle tears: she is but a child, you know, and we must treat her as such. As you justly say, we have talked enough of this strange girl,—and now we will think only of ourselves. When, my adored friend, when am I to hope that this dear hand—”

“There’s a frightful smell of burning in the house, ma’am,” said Miss Parsons, bursting into the room, and spoiling one of Frank’s best attitudes: “but I’ve come to beg you will not be alarmed, as there’s nothing the matter—it’s only—”

“Really, Miss Parsons, you are unbearable!”

almost screamed Mrs. Wilkins, as she snatched her hand from the grasp of Harcourt ; " you have terrified me to death—I am absolutely sick—faint ;—send Willis with my sal-volatile—do not bring it yourself—do not let me see you again till I send for you. And now, my dear Frank," she asked, in a gentler tone, as the door closed behind the frightened companion,—“ what is it that you were going to ask ?”

CHAPTER XVIII.

• AGNES DAVENEL did indeed, as Mrs. Wilkins had informed Harcourt, weep silent and heart-wrung tears when she reached her own chamber. She looked around her : every thing was strange ; there was no resting-place for affection. She thought of the past ; on one sunny spot only could her memory rest ; all, save that one, was a dreary blank ; she reflected on the present, and she shrank shudderingly from the reality which it presented : a roof grudgingly and murmuringly granted, which could never be a home ; a protectress cold and repelling, who could never be a friend ; the only one who loved her, forbidden to sooth her sorrows ; the only one she feared, lording it in her very presence, and, as it were, daring her to resent the insult. At length a smile wreathed her young lip : her thoughts had wandered into the future—far, far away from the misery of the past, and the bitterness of the present ; they were with Eustace in an humble, but a happy home : she fancied the long bright morning, spent in quiet and contented usefulness ; the calm

twilight, the hour of social converse, passed in words of tenderness and affection; and dearer still, the well-ordered and cheerful hearth, gay with its dancing light and its million associations; how beautiful, how bland was the anticipation of such a home! But the sand-pile of imagination soon crumbled away; and again she was seated in her solitary chamber in the house of her cold relative, beneath the same roof with the man whom she dreaded. Again the large, sad tears fell heavily on her cheek; and had it not been that Eustace felt a pride in her beauty, she could have prayed, in the bitterness of her spirit, that it might pass away from her, even now, in her bright youth.

"And how shall I write to him?" she mused: "what can I say to shed over his heart that peace which is now a stranger to my own? I dare not tell him that the bold bad man whom he, even gentle and loving as he is, hates so bitterly, I dare not tell him that he is *here*—that we have met; that again he has uttered words of insolence and scorn to me, a betrothed wife; that he may be, for aught I know, an inmate of the house—now, indeed," she continued, passionately wringing her hands, "do I feel my utter helplessness, my miserable dependence!"

Agnes sat for awhile in an agony of grief, but after a time she rose; resolutely wiped away the fast-coming tears, and knelt down in silent prayer. Long she continued pouring out her wounded spirit before the Being who hath power to heal the breaking heart, and to raise up the drooping head. It was a beautiful sight to see that young and gentle girl seeking peace where alone it is to be found; thus casting her cares at the footstool of her God, and forgetting the creature in the Creator. When her prayer was ended, she looked up, and she was

no longer in tears ; and ere long she sat down to write the promised letter to Eustace.

“Did I tell you that I am happy ?” thus she wrote ; “it were to wrong alike your affection and my own ; happiness and Eustace are now so blended in my heart that they must exist together. I am contented, if that be indeed content which, amid a stagnation of the spirit, teaches us to look calmly on our actual position ; I am grateful, for have I not great cause to be so ? The thought of you, Eustace, the memory of your generous affection, would alone ensure my gratitude ; but I have still greater cause for thankfulness. I look around me on the houseless mendicants who wander beneath my window, and I remember that, like them, I might not have had a resting-place, but for His mercy who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb ; and though I may sometimes weep in my solitude, still I am grateful. Eustace ! have you forgotten how often we looked together on the glorious sky of evening ? how we watched the deepening shadows of night stealing, like a sable veil, over the face of nature ? how we loved the soft, sweet, silver moon when she rose like some peaceful spirit, calmly and silently to her cloudless throne ? and how we fancied a thousand bright fables as we gazed upon the glittering stars ? I love that hour still, Eustace, beyond all others ; for then my heart is full of you and of your affection ; and when I sink to sleep, you are in my dreams : I look upon you, I listen to you, your low voice is in my ear, and in the depths of my spirit, and I *am* happy *then* ! And what though I awaken to feel that all is but a dream, will not the time come when I shall no longer fear to awake ? when my night-visions will but reflect the blessedness of the day which has preceded them ? It will

—it must. We are forbidden to look upon each other. Merciful was the boon of thought! *that* at least is free; and shall we not see each other mentally throughout every hour of the long weary day? Yes, Eustace; of this happiness, at least, they cannot deprive you—AGNES.”

When she had closed her letter, the orphan sat for a time with her cheek resting on her hand; had she dared to pour out the tenderness of her whole heart, what gentle things might she not have said to Eustace; had she dwelt upon her affection, had she told him all her love, how differently would that letter have been worded; but Agnes felt that, even dear as he was, she could not do this! It was the first time that she had ventured to trust the expression of her attachment to aught beyond a whisper; and now her woman-cheek crimsoned, and her woman-heart beat quicker as she looked upon the paper whereon she had inscribed her first acknowledgment of passion.

She was still in the same attitude, when a gentle knock at the door of her apartment startled her from her reverie. With a heightened colour, and a trembling hand, she secured the letter, which was lying before her, and then bade her visiter enter; the door opened, and the meaningless countenance of Miss Parsons presented itself.

“Pray come in,” said Agnes, as she rose from her seat, and placed a chair for her unexpected guest: “you are very kind thus to visit me in my own apartment, more particularly as I am but sad society at present.”

Poor Miss Parsons had not been told that she was very kind for the last seventeen years, and as she seated herself, she looked up with quiet surprise at the fair girl who had just uttered the assurance. “I

thought you were not well, and might require something," she said, calmly ; "you looked but poorly when you came down this morning ; and as you do not yet know the ways of the house, I just came to tell you that you must ask for what you want, without waiting for Mrs. Wilkins to offer it to you ; she never orders any thing except for herself and Mr. Harcourt."

Agnes had never felt the want of sympathy and kindness more than she did at this moment, and she looked her gratitude for the kindly forethought of the simple-minded companion ; but when she mentioned the name of the young barrister, the orphan started, and listened anxiously. Miss Parsons however continued silent, having said all which she came to say, and being accustomed to confine her conversational efforts within the narrow limits of simple expediency. In fact, had Miss Parsons been by nature a model of garrulity when she entered the establishment of Mrs. Wilkins, she could not have continued such after the first six weeks. The widow's dialogues with her dependant consisted of assertion and dictation on the one side, and monosyllabic assent on the other. Of course, the associates of Mrs. Wilkins were cautious not to honour by any portion of their notice a person on whom she herself bestowed so little of her own ; and thus Miss Parsons had degenerated by degrees into a species of human dormouse, sleeping away one-half of her time, and eating and drinking during the remainder.

A few seconds elapsed ere Agnes could command sufficient courage to ask, in a low voice—"Pray, madam, who is Mr. Harcourt?"

Miss Parsons edged her chair still closer to that of her companion ; gave a sort of convulsive clutch at her well-worn wig, which destroyed the propriety of its position ; and after taking a long look round

the apartment, as though she feared that every piece of furniture which it contained possessed an ear to hear, and a tongue to report her communication, whispered out, "I really don't know, Miss Davenel; I wish I did."

Agnes could have smiled at all the preliminary caution of the old lady when she considered in what it had terminated, had she not shuddered to reflect on the state of moral and miserable abasement which it betrayed; she sighed deeply, and continued silent.

After the pause of a few moments, Miss Parsons began to fidget on her chair; there was something in the fair young creature beside her which won even upon her blunted and deadened feelings. Just at this time also her mind was unusually burthened by anxiety and doubt. She longed to communicate to some one her fears and her suspicions: hitherto she had not met with any person who would listen to her, or in whom she dared confide; but Agnes looked so gentle, and smiled so sweetly, that she felt sure that even if she could not assist, she would not betray her.

Strange power of purity! Agnes sat patiently and kindly waiting until Miss Parsons should either speak again or take her leave, wholly unsuspecting of the feelings of trust and confidence which were gradually deepening in the bosom of that single-hearted woman towards herself; at length, timidly, she gave utterance to her anxiety.

"Who is he indeed, Miss Davenel? I do not know—Mrs. Wilkins does not know—no one knows: who he wishes to be, and who he will be before long is another thing, and one that everybody knows." Miss Parsons drew a long breath, and turned a frightened glance on Agnes, as though she almost repented her want of caution.

"Who he will be?" echoed Agnes, involuntarily.

"Yes, yes; who he will too surely be, soon," pursued the poor old lady, reassured by the sound of her companion's low, sweet voice. "I have watched, and I have seen, Miss Davenel; I have listened, and I have heard—I see you blame me," she continued, as she remarked the blush which mantled the brow of the orphan, and her instinctive recoil: "I knew that it was wrong; but remember that I looked and listened for my bread; that I watched to learn if I were to be a beggar; it is hard to be cast on the world in our old age, Miss Davenel, when health and strength are wasted—it is hard, very hard!" Miss Parsons paused, trembling at her own unusual vehemence; but the orphan, rebuked by her words and tone, hung her head meekly, as though in sorrow that she had thrust the barbed arrow yet deeper into the wound.

"When I was young," pursued Miss Parsons, "I felt as though I could have struggled against a world of suffering; I don't know how it is, but now I have only strength of purpose left to bend my neck to the yoke. Even if I had the means of subsistence, how could I exist? I have no will; I am too old to strive for one—I have no hope; I have outlived all that—what is to become of me?"

Tears were in the eyes of Agnes. "I do not understand you," she said, gently; "surely you have no intention of quitting your present home?"

"It will be no home for me," replied Miss Parsons, sadly, as she shook her head in all the hopelessness of conviction; "it will be no home for me when Mrs. Wilkins becomes the wife of Mr. Harcourt."

"The wife of Mr. Harcourt!" exclaimed Agnes, in undisguised astonishment: "impossible! really, my dear madam, you are terrifying yourself with shadowy fancies."

"Is it a shadowy fancy to see him kiss her hand, and to hear him talk to her of love and marriage, and a future life of devotion to her alone? Is it fancy when I am sent from the room, sometimes from the house, lest I should break in upon their privacy?"

The indignant blood mounted to the brow of Agnes; "Mean, pitiful wretch!" she exclaimed; "worse than even I had thought him!"

Miss Parsons was too much absorbed in her own griefs to remark the unguarded apostrophe of her companion; and after a moment's hesitation, she resumed: "Take care of yourself, Miss Davenel; you are young and beautiful; and although Mr. Harcourt may persuade a woman of twice his years, with his smooth tongue and his ready smile, to believe that he loves her, he cannot hoodwink others. I have no faith in his flippant professions, in his voluble assertions; and you have no smooth path before you, my dear young lady."

Agnes replied by a sigh so deep that it startled her companion.

"Nay, nay, do not take my words so much to heart," quickly remonstrated the good-natured Miss Parsons, who had neither tact nor talent ever to look beyond the surface; "I would only warn you: he may not be so very bad, after all; but it's a sore temptation for a light-headed young man like Mr. Harcourt; he *must* make comparisons in his own mind—he must see the difference between your beauty and Mrs. Wilkins's wrinkles. You have but one course to pursue."

"Oh! point it out, I implore of you!" exclaimed Agnes; "be the path ever so thorny, fear me not, I will tread it unshrinkingly."

Miss Parsons mused for a moment, as she contemplated an energy which she could not compre-

hend; but she was so unaccustomed to have her opinion listened to, far less sought for, that she yielded to her innocently-gratified vanity, and continued, with a smile of as much sagacity as she could call up, "Simply then, my dear Miss Davenel, I should counsel you never to be alone with Mr. Harcourt when you can avoid it."

"I will shrink from him as I would from the breath of the plague-wind," interposed Agnes.

"Never appear pleased with his attention; Mrs. Wilkins has the eye of an eagle; and always, my dear young lady, in pity to her vanity, sit with your back to the light."

Agnes, had her heart been light as it once was, could have smiled at this simple and guileless code of feminine tactics, delivered in a tone as oracular as that of the Delphic priestess; but she only sighed to find how little the well-meant but shallow counsel of her new friend could avail her.

As Miss Parsons rose to depart, a sudden sense of the extent to which she stood committed by all the information and inferences which she had volunteered to a comparative stranger, should that stranger betray her, appeared to fasten on her mind; and she paused for an instant, overwhelmed by the conviction: her breath came quick, and her lip trembled with emotion; but when at length she again raised her eyes to the face of Agnes, she became reassured; and as she seized the hand which was extended to her, she murmured, "No, no; I do not fear you—you will not betray me to my ruin—you are too good, too gentle to beggar my gray hairs."

"I would die first!" said Agnes, ardently; and the single-minded Miss Parsons felt, as she listened, that she was safe.

CHAPTER XIX.

NEVER was a less happy-looking nor less social party collected in the library of the Earl of Somerville than the one to which we are about to introduce our readers. The apartment was the very imbodyment of comfort; the heavy crimson curtains were closely drawn; the fire blazed cheerfully in the polished grate; and the huge log which surmounted it threw out at intervals a shower of golden sparks, as the encroaching flames made fiercer and bolder inroads towards its centre. The walls were lined with books in costly bindings, each in its place, as though ranged there less for use than ornament; the rich Turkey carpet buried the feet like many-coloured moss, and the writing-apparatus which glittered gayly among uncut pamphlets, unopened letters, and unfolded newspapers, was massive and magnificent. On one side of the fire sat Lady Clara Nichols, with the countess her aunt for her vis-à-vis; stretched along a sofa lay Lord Ashburnham, sharing his resting-place with a favourite pointer; while the earl himself was pacing slowly and silently to and fro the apartment.

"It can signify little at all events," said Lady Clara, somewhat sullenly, resuming a conversation which had evidently been of no pleasurable description: "we have all looked forward to the event as a very probable one from the first; and it can signify little whether it occurs now or a few months hence."

"You are in error, Lady Clara Nichols," said the

earl, sententiously, as he paused in his progress across the floor ; " it will signify very considerably : time might have stayed the tongues of the world—time might have silenced the gossiping of your own clique—time might have enabled me to pay off Ashburnham's debts—"

" And enabled Ashburnham to contract new ones," observed Lady Clara, still more sullenly.

" Don't make me a party in the business, I beg," said the young man, as he pinched the ear of Rover until he howled ; " I hate all these affairs, as I do bad claret, or a long bill."

" It has been a foolish business altogether—that is my private opinion," observed the countess ; " and the sooner Clara frees herself of the connexion the better, I think."

" Vastly well ! and very heroic," resumed the earl, contemptuously ; " but probably you are not aware, madam, that your niece is very likely to free herself of the money as well as of the man ; that if she really determine on this mad exploit, she will shake off the gold dust as well as the city dust from her feet. Ha ! you look amazed ; but Mr. Nichols was not the tool which in your wisdom you imagined him to be, or you were not sufficiently crafty in your trade to understand how to make him available—I have guessed from the commencement how the affair was likely to terminate ; I told you on a former, a very remote occasion, that you were bad tacticians."

" I remember it, my lord," said the countess, somewhat ruffled ; " but I consider both your daughter and myself to be undeserving of the taunt—no aunt ever struggled more arduously for the establishment of a niece than I did for that of Lady Clara ; nor do I think that any unmarried female of family and title ever exerted herself more strenu-

ously to second the views of her relatives than she has done."

"Did I not sacrifice myself for my family?" demanded Lady Clara, in the tone of a martyr.

"Your family are deeply indebted to you," said the earl, with a bend of affected deference; "may I ask how they have benefited by your self-immolation? My landed property is heavily mortgaged—Ashburnham's credit will not hold out six months longer—I have not a stick of timber worth cutting on any of my estates—and I positively cannot stand another season in town. You are the wife of a man worth forty thousand a year—a man who might have been managed, had you known how to play your cards. The little benefit which your family, for whom you so generously sacrificed yourself, have derived from this ill-omened marriage, has been of their own procuring. If I found Mr. Nichols manageable, *you* surely ought to have done so."

"I shall be satisfied with the house in town, and three thousand a year," said Lady Clara, quietly: "he may do as he pleases with the remainder—build hospitals or alms-houses, if such be his fancy, and luxuriate in the view of his patrician name, graven on the centre-stone above the door of entrance. I shall not interfere with any of his pursuits, and I only require the same forbearance on his part with regard to mine."

The earl laughed; it was a bitter, mocking laugh, that thrilled to the heart of Lady Clara. "I should think you will find some difficulty in convincing Mr. Nichols of the expediency of such an arrangement."

"In that case," said the little countess, fidgeting on her seat, and glancing compassionately at her

niece,—“in that case, my lord, Clara might as well have married for love.”

“And did she not?” asked Lord Somerville, ironically: “I am sure, from part of a conversation which I accidentally overheard between Mr. Nichols and herself previous to their marriage, I thought that there could not be a doubt of her having done so.”

“This is really worse than idle!” interposed Lady Clara, indignantly; “unworthy of you, my lord, and insulting to me. If I am to be thus requited for my obedience, I might as well have gratified my own fancy, and married Mr. Harcourt, whom I gave up to oblige you.”

“It would have been better if you had, perhaps,” said the earl, dryly, as he looked steadily towards her.

Lady Clara coloured over brow and bosom; and she leaned forward in her chair, as if preparing to reply, but she nevertheless continued silent.

“We will change the subject for one which may prove more agreeable,” resumed the earl, still more coldly: “we have, in starting the present topic, certainly plunged our hands among the nettles.”

Still there was silence.

“So many persons think Clara to blame not to separate from her husband at once,” said the countess, with ready tact: “I do believe that fifty friends have begged me to remonstrate with her on the subject.”

“You are fortunate in being able to boast of fifty friends, Lady Blacksley,” replied the earl, “even though they may be very misjudging ones; but I doubt extremely if any of them would be kind enough to remove the obloquy of such a step from the shoulders of your niece to their own, even though

it may have been of their own counselling. The simple question now is, whether Lady Clara Nichols, to gratify a feeling of childish wilfulness, really intends to suffer her husband to leave town with such a resolution as the one which he has expressed?"

"Most undoubtedly I do," was the reply. "I can see no possible advantage to myself in countenancing such a spirit of obstinate domination on the part of a man who is totally indifferent to me:—the whole affair may be summed up in a few words,—if he *will* go, he *must* go—if I *will not* go, I *shall not* go—we are both free agents."

"Then the business is settled," remarked the countess, quietly.

"I am glad of it," yawned Lord Ashburnham: "these family discussions always disturb my digestion: if a man really wishes to enjoy existence, he should always allow himself to stagnate after dinner."

"I am afraid, Frederick," said the earl, "that you will stagnate altogether, if you do not look about you. I wish you could win some heiress, whose money might free you from your embarrassments."

"What! with Clara's marriage before my eyes as a warning, my lord? No, no; 'forewarned, forearmed,' says the proverb; it must be all love now; rosy-lipped, laughing love, to ensnare me after my experience of wedded life in my own family."

"Ashburnham is right," said the countess, in a tone of sentiment: "affection is, after all, the best foundation for happiness."

"We always value that which we have never known," followed up the earl, in an accent of biting sarcasm: "we make sunny valleys and diamond mines in every mental Utopia. But if indeed this foolish resolve of Clara's be irrevocable, we must

begin to look on it calmly and dispassionately,—in short, we must make the best of it—but my decided advice is, that she leave town with her husband, and at least endeavour to keep up appearances for a few months longer. She does not see enough of Nichols to render the infliction very unbearable.”

“My mind is made up,” said the lady, calmly.

“Very well—then it only remains for him to make up his: it may be as uncompromising as your own.”

“He cannot hesitate to allow Lady Clara three thousand a year out of forty,” said the countess; “if he should, he will degenerate into a Jew. Remember, he has enjoyed the *éclat* of his marriage.”

The earl laughed again: it was a very disagreeable species of laughter; it said all those bitter things which his high-breeding would not allow him to express by words. There was a sort of free-masonry in it; you felt at once what his opinion was as to the sagacity and point of that by which it had been elicited.

“I really see nothing so very ridiculous in my remark, my lord,” said the countess, pettishly: “Mr. Nichols married from a feeling of idle ambition, and he has gratified the fancy.”

“What a development of matrimonial motives!” said the earl, with a smile: “however, we will let it pass. Nichols will be here shortly, and we must do the best we can with him. Ashburnham, you may as well not be present; he may rake up a few disagreeable reminiscences of past accommodation, if you remain here to remind him of them.”

“Well, then,” said the young lord, as he gathered himself up, and rose from the sofa, “I will to my club. Adieu, Clara; a free-will and a good income to you, *carissima mia*!” and with these words he disappeared.

CHAPTER XX.

"You understand me, Miss Davenel," said Mrs. Wilkins, coldly, as she sat opposite to the orphan, and fixed her eyes almost sternly upon her excited countenance: "I must have no coquettish whims, no flirting fancies to attract the attention of Mr. Harcourt. There are reasons which render all such attentions on his part to you, or to any other young person, highly indecorous."

"There are, indeed, madam," replied Agnes, with a deep sigh. Mrs. Wilkins looked at her in astonishment: could she be conscious of the precise nature of those reasons? it almost appeared as though she was; and the good lady fidgeted on her chair, and felt vastly uncomfortable that her secret was betrayed, and extremely curious as to how it had been so; but Agnes made no further remark, and there was a calm collectedness about her that arrested the questioning which rose to the lips of Mrs. Wilkins.

"Mr. Harcourt is a frequent visiter here," she pursued, after a short pause; "he is a person for whom I have a high regard; but as he comes into this house in the character of my friend, it will be as well for you to see as little of him as may be consistent with good-breeding. He is a young man of high connexions, and moves in the first circles; he may be pardoned, therefore, if he is somewhat fastidious on the subject of his associates; you are aware, Miss Davenel, that as a dependant of mine,

—as a poor relation, in short, you can never hope for the friendship of Mr. Harcourt, though you may contribute to his amusement;—if you have any pride, therefore, you will avoid this.”

“As I would a pestilence, madam,” said Agnes, in a tone of haughty disdain, which betrayed not the bitter sense of her humiliating position, so ruthlessly forced upon her by the words of her companion; “if Mr. Harcourt indeed seek to pass an idle hour with any individual under this roof, that individual shall not be Agnes Davenel. Amid all my poverty, madam, amid all my affliction, I have never yet bent my spirit so far earthward as to suffer myself to become the plaything of a libertine—”

“Of a what?” exclaimed Mrs. Wilkins, with distended eyeballs; “a libertine, did you say, Miss Davenel? Have a care, young lady, I am not easily roused to anger; but I warn you that another disrespectful word on the subject of my exemplary friend Mr. Harcourt, and you will cease to be sheltered by my roof!”

“And must not that man be a libertine, madam,” asked the orphan, proudly, as she swept back the dark hair from her brow, and looked calmly at her excited companion: “a hollow-hearted libertine, against whom you, in your prudence, consider it necessary to warn one so helpless, so unprotected as myself; and that, too, under your own roof? Surely, madam, I may be pardoned the use of such a term, even though I apply it to one whom you honour by the name of friend.”

“I never allow any one in my house to hold such arguments, or to deliver such opinions, Miss Davenel; one mistress is enough in a family, and you are not likely to control me, as you probably did the callous and crazy old woman who died and left you a beggar. You come of a bad stock, young

lady; of a rebellious generation: remember your father and mother, they talked as you do; yes, yes, they had their inclinations, and their resolutions, and they made something of them: your mother—keep your seat; we had better understand each other at once, and I am not accustomed to see people leave the room while I am speaking; your mother was a proud beauty without sixpence; and as you have doubtless been told that you have a pretty face, you are anxious to tread in her steps; you had better look to your footing, for I believe she found it but a slippery path at last. Your father was a ‘gentleman, and a man of honour;’ I believe those were the words used in the letter of Mrs. Sydenham, when she wrote to ask of me that mercy for you which she denied to her own child; and I am bound to believe that he was, for he was a connexion of my own; but your penniless beauty will do very little for you; and you have no pretension to fasten such names upon my friends. While we are on the subject I talk to you seriously, and remember that it is for the last time.”

Mrs. Wilkins might now have talked for ever; for the spirit of the orphan was crushed,—she had been taunted with her poverty—that she could have borne, for the sarcasm extended not beyond herself; but she had heard the memory of her last relative branded with indignity—for the first time she had listened to words of contempt and bitterness reflecting on her parents: those beloved and lamented parents, whose memory was to her as a holy thing never to be rudely touched! She would have flown from the withering sound, but she had been compelled to sit and listen—and now she cared not what more might follow—she could bear all.

“I insist, Miss Davenel,” thus was the theme pursued, “that you treat Mr. Harcourt on all occasions

with attention and respect. I do not mean giggling attentions, for which he would despise you ; but that quiet compliance with all his wishes, that ready obedience to all his commands, which you would yield to mine : but do not let me discover that you go beyond this ; you are fairly warned, and I never speak twice to caution."

"Surely my heart must break !" murmured Agnes to herself, as she entered her small and solitary chamber, and flung herself on her knees. "Surely, surely this cannot last ! oh ! Eustace, could you have heard her ; could you see me now ! But you are spared at least this pang ; you have not seen your Agnes humbled to the dust, and trampled on by the insolence of wealth !"

Now, at this bitter moment, Agnes remembered that fine passage of mythology which describes the two brothers Cleobis and Biton, waiting at the portal of the temple of Juno, after having dutifully drawn the chariot of their mother to that sacred spot, while that grateful and happy mother besought of the goddess that she would reward them for their filial love with the best gift which mortals could receive. Agnes remembered then, in her affliction, that the prayer was granted, and that a deep sleep fell upon the brothers from which they awoke no more ! What would not Agnes have given to bend down her young head, and lay it at rest for ever !

It is well for us, weak, short-sighted mortals as we are, that our hasty and ill-digested prayers are not granted on the instant ; that the petitions of our selfishness are not registered ; for we are too prone to overlook the misery which we should inflict on others by the operation of those vain desires ; and to forget the anguish which we should bequeath to

those who cherish us, by our own dastardly escape from suffering.

What is that cowardly wish to die when we are bowed by sorrow, or tortured by accumulated miseries, but mental suicide? and what is suicide, that last, worst, deadliest of transgressions, that crowning sin of mortality, but moral cowardice? No man who moves upon the surface of this glorious earth, no being upon whom the Creator has impressed his divine image, *can* be so utter an outcast from his kind as to be *quite alone*; the world may have gone hardly with him—friends may have fallen from him—associates may have deceived him—he may have been cheated of his birthright—have been trampled under the chariot-wheels of the great—have wandered in rags, and sunk to the earth with the heart-sickness of hunger, or the maddening pang of thirst, while others have rioted on his inheritance; and yet even thus—beggared, debased, and hopeless—even thus he would be less than human, did not *one* fond heart cling to him alike through all—some one fond friend, or fonder wife, or tender child, or aged and palsied parent—some one strong link to bind him to his kind, and to turn him to his God! And while *that one* remains, what is the suicide? He escapes himself, but he augments the misery of another a hundred-fold—he flies from the fell tiger Despair, but he casts into the jungle the last, best friend which misery had left to him, to appease the craving of the monster!

If sorrow come to the strong man in the citadel of his home; if the arms of his wife and the smiles of his children cannot beat back the enemy; if his household gods are overthrown around him; should he not possess moral courage to collect the fragments, and to endeavour to raise for these a lowlier altar and a more humble abiding-place; but casting

from him at once all energy and religion, hide his head in his mantle, and rush unbidden into the presence of his Maker with his own blood upon his hands—what is the suicide? Ask his bereaved and horror-stricken wife—ask his helpless and dishonoured children—and then look into your own heart, and be answered!

Agnes rose from her knees in a chastened spirit: the name of Eustace had mingled with her prayer; and that name was ever to her as a chastening spell. She felt that she had yet much suffering in store, but hope was at her heart; she prayed for patience, meekly and humbly prayed; and peace fell upon her sinking soul, as the manna was showered upon those who were fainting in the wilderness. The same holy Hand bestowed both the one and the other!

CHAPTER XXI.

“No; not a step farther, Mr. Harcourt,” said Lady Clara, with affected alarm; “not a step farther, though you were as bright as Apollo, and as learned as Eratosthenes.”

Frank paused with the box-door in his hand.

“Fly,” continued the lady, with the same pretty frown, “to the Antipodes—anywhere—as though you were mounted on the arrow of Abaris.”

“Your ladyship is mystical and mythological to-night,” smiled Harcourt, as he advanced and took a seat beside her; “nevertheless, I came here to chat with you, to listen to Pasta, and to look at Taglioni,

and I cannot afford to be disappointed—and now, tell me, why am I under ban ?”

“Pshaw ! nonsense !” said Lady Blacksley, as she took his extended hand ; “only another whim of the earl’s.—Nichols is jealous, it seems.”

“A modern Othello !” smiled Frank, with a civil sneer : “why will the Moor marry a Desdemona, and then doubt his own worthiness ?—it is somewhat early to play the husband.”

“Fy, fy ; high treason against my wedded lord,” interposed Lady Clara ; “but seriously, Mr. Frank Harcourt is the last person whom I wished to see enter my box to-night.”

“Flattering !” ejaculated the young barrister, as he made the tour of the circle with his lorgnette ; “and wherefore ?”

“Because you are to monsieur the very model of le garçon volage—because, in short—there, be satisfied : I cannot explain why.”

“The inference is palpable,” replied the unblushing Frank : “Mr. Nichols, then, worthy man ! is jealous of *me* !—I am certainly more obliged by his good opinion than by that of your ladyship.”

“You are ungenerous, Harcourt,” said the lady, coldly ; “I have but the consciousness of my own propriety of conduct to console me under the degradation of Mr. Nichols’s low-bred suspicions.”

Frank pressed to his lips the fan with which he was ostensibly occupied, to conceal the smile which had instinctively wreathed them.

“Why is the dragon not here in person to guard the golden fruit of his Hesperides ?”

“He is engaged with the earl,” said Lady Blacksley.

“It is the curse of wealth to ‘separate too oft most loving hearts,’” laughed Frank.

The countess smiled, and Lady Clara tossed her little head in scorn.

"I heard to-day at my club," said Harcourt, in a low voice, "that Nichols was about to leave town—and to leave it *en garçon*—am I to hope that it is so?"

"I know not why you should put the question in so extraordinary a shape," was the cold reply; "nevertheless it does not alter the fact. Mr. Nichols talks of going into Shropshire—I have no desire to be expatriated, and shall consequently remain in town."

"Wisely resolved!" exclaimed Frank, as he threw himself into a more becoming attitude; "*s'enterrer vivif* is by no means desirable."

"Apropos," said Lady Clara, anxious to turn the conversation from her own position; "how speeds your wooing?"

The blood rushed to the brow of Frank; he laughed uneasily, and was not exactly prepared with a reply. Lady Clara pursued her advantage:—"Why, one would imagine, by the flushed face and unusual silence of Mr. Harcourt, that the fair lady had been cruel! 'Can such things be?' Fancy this box a confessional, and make a 'clean breast' of all your miseries, that we may know how to commence the duty of consolation."

"My misery," said Frank, "has a very opposite source—my *Dulcinea*, I fear, does not 'love wisely, but too well'—and I equally fear that I am an ingrate."

"Coxcomb!" laughed Lady Clara. Harcourt shrugged his shoulders, and looked ludicrously miserable.

The box-door opened, and the earl and his son-in-law entered; Mr. Nichols glanced from Harcourt to Lord Somerville, and from his lordship to

Lady Clara, whose very lips became pale as she discovered the identity of her visitors:

"Has your ladyship any commands into Shropshire?" asked the husband, composedly, as he stood beside her leaning upon the back of the chair from which Frank had risen on his entrance: "I leave town to-morrow morning."

"So soon!" said Lady Clara, startled out of her habitual self-possession by the collectedness of his manner: "I thought—"

She paused; and Nichols, after having waited a few seconds for the termination of the sentence, resumed, in a tone somewhat less steady, "I am glad to find that Lady Clara Nichols has indeed bestowed a thought upon the subject; I scarcely flattered myself that such was the case."

"Disagreeable reflections will recur without our own volition," said the lady.

"And is the fact of my leaving town really disagreeable to you?" earnestly asked the husband, in a low tone, as he approached a step nearer to her chair. It were difficult to guess how the question might have been answered, had not Lady Clara at that instant looked up, and met the eyes of Harcourt: there was an expression of scornful amazement in them which she could not brook, and she rallied in an instant.

"By no means; my allusion was less definite, I spoke in mere idleness; the roads are in fine order for travelling, I believe, and the weather is charming—for the park."

"Your ladyship, I am to imply, has then no commands with which to favour me?" said Nichols, coldly and interrogatively.

"None: I prefer in all cases to avail myself of the good offices of a servant: they are paid for their obedience."

"In that point at least I cannot presume to rival them," was the retort; "I will not intrude further—I have many arrangements which require attention," and he moved to leave the box.

Lord Somerville had hitherto stood aloof; and if we may except a cool "Your servant, sir," to Harcourt, in perfect silence; but he now felt himself called upon to interfere: "Nichols, my dear fellow," he said, in his most bland tone, "you positively shall not stir a step for these ten minutes to come; how! leave the house without one look at the divine Taglioni? now, out on you for a Vandal!"

"I care not though she should never make another pirouette," replied Nichols: "I am literally sick of all these fooleries—"

"Tell it not in Gath!" laughed Harcourt.

"I care not where it may be told," pursued Nichols, more composedly, for the voice of Frank had at once recalled his self-possession; "I never believed that I could enjoy the anticipation of simple, natural pleasures as I now do; I am literally sick of the hollow, artificial frivolities of London life."

"Sighing for green fields, shady groves, and nightingales," sneered Lady Clara.

"Perhaps rather for cherry-lipped peasant girls," dryly remarked the earl, turning a stern look on his daughter.

"Possibly," was the calm rejoinder of the lady; "nothing of that description would astonish me; our separate tastes are all born with us."

"Really," broke in the countess, apropos of nothing, as was usually the case with her remarks, "I never witnessed so barefaced a flirtation as that between the handsome Count —— and the

—— ambassadress ! She actually has no idea of tact !”

“ She is at least not singular in that deficiency,” said the earl.

“ Oh ! certainly, he is quite as bad,” pursued Lady Blacksley, pointing her lorgnette at the box of the lovely little ambassadress ; “ I wonder that people can expose themselves to the remarks of a crowd ! Were I the ambassador——”

“ What then ?” inquired Nichols, in a tone sufficiently startling.

“ I would not suffer it,” resolutely followed up the countess.

“ Oh ! believe me, his excellency has too much pride to wish to cage a truant bird, my good madam,” said her nephew ; “ if she will fly, he is right not to fetter her by jesses.”

Harcourt looked in astonishment at the speaker, and their eyes met : for a moment Frank endeavoured to sustain the gaze without shrinking, but he failed ; nor was his situation ameliorated by the uncomfortable consciousness that there was a deeper shade upon his brow than that which it had gained from the crimson drapery against which he leaned.

Little more passed before the departure of the earl and his son-in-law. Harcourt, awkwardly affecting to distinguish a friend in the pit whom he particularly wished to meet, accompanied them in their retreat, and had the satisfaction of witnessing as cold a parting between the wedded pair as even his selfish nature could desire. He gave them ample time to leave the house, and then retraced his steps to Lady Clara’s box, but it was vacant. He stood for a moment on the threshold lost in conjecture, and then perplexed, and infinitely more out of humour than became him, followed their example by an immediate retreat. As he reached the door, he

had the pleasure of seeing the carriage of Lady Clara Nichols just driving off; and throwing himself into his cabriolet, he put his horse to its speed, and soon alighted at his lodgings.

CHAPTER XXII.

AGNES was alone: Mrs. Wilkins, attended by Miss Parsons, had gone to visit a sick friend whose residence was distant from her own, and the gentle girl hailed with delight the prospect of a short period of solitude. For the first time since she had dwelt beneath the roof of her stern relative, a feeling of comparative happiness prompted her to resume the cherished task of completing an unartist-like, but striking, portrait of Eustace, which she had commenced in the humble home endeared to her by so many cherished recollections. With a smile upon her lips, and a soft light dancing in her eyes, she stationed herself at her drawing-frame within a window recess of the breakfast-room; and as she plied her pencil she hummed to herself the simple ballad which he had loved the best. An hour had worn away thus—a happy hour, when the play of a warm breath upon her cheek startled her, and looking up, she almost shrieked as she met the eyes of Harcourt; instantly, however, recovering her self-possession, she coldly courtesied to the intruder, and hastily lifting the portrait from the table, prepared to withdraw.

“Miss Davenel,” said Harcourt, as he placed himself in her path, and intercepted her retreat; “I feel that I have merited your displeasure; but if as

a penitent offender I may claim forgiveness, believe me when I assure you I deserve it."

"Between strangers, sir," coldly replied Agnes, as she still attempted to quit the room, "there can be nothing to forgive."

"Nay, by the gods, you leave me not thus!" exclaimed Frank; "I have an infinity to ask of you, and to tell you—we *must* be friends—ay, and understand each other thoroughly,—Agnes,—yes, I mark your pretty start of scorn—but still I say, *Agnes*, for both our sakes we must understand each other; it is in my power to render your sojourn in this house a heaven or a hell—choose between them."

"Every thing must to me be equally indifferent with which your image is connected," said the orphan, bitterly; "your very sight is loathsome to me!"

"Ha! is it so?" and Frank laughed. "Times will change, proud beauty—but be reasonable, Miss Davenel," he continued, suddenly mastering his feeling; "be reasonable. You must have heard that I am about to marry, not *my* grandmother, but yours:" and he laughed again, though with a different expression. "No doubt you will tender your sincere good wishes on the occasion, and in sooth I am likely to need them,—I give my hand, and in return my bride endows me with all her worldly goods,—yourself among the number:—need I say"—and the voice of Harcourt softened, as he clasped the hand which Agnes in vain endeavoured to release—"need I say that of all which I may gain by my ill-assorted marriage, the privilege of looking upon, of listening to Agnes Davenel will be to me by far the more precious? Recur not in thought, I entreat of you, to my madness at our last interview. I knew not what I did;—astonishment at the bright, the un-

looked-for vision of your beauty, deranged my senses—I was not master of myself—but now—”

“Having recovered them, you will, I trust, sir, forbear to insult me by language as offensive as it is misplaced.”

“Insult you, Miss Davenel !” exclaimed Frank, in the most approved accent of deprecatory horror ; “you ! whom, from the first moment in which I beheld you, I have never been able to banish from my thoughts—from my heart—you—”

“This effrontery is insufferable,” said Agnes, as with a violent effort she disengaged her hand ; “can you really imagine that I have forgotten the circumstances of that meeting to which you so unblushingly allude ? No, sir, only with my life will perish the humiliating remembrance ! First, then, in justice to myself, I command you instantly to desist from all further annoyance of this description—and next, by the recollection of your position in this family, as you are a man—”

“My position in this family is that of your lover—your devoted, your adoring lover.”

“Shame, Mr. Harcourt !” said Agnes ; “are you not the betrothed husband of Mrs. Wilkins ?”

Frank laughed aloud with the most unblushing effrontery. “And what then, my pretty prude ? did you never read the ballad in which it states that ‘lips though blooming must still be fed ?’ That is my case, and as in the instance of your antiquarian thirtieth cousin I found that it was ‘no song no supper,’ I was e’en obliged to—”

“Now tenfold shame !” exclaimed the orphan, shaking back the long hair from her brow, and looking all her heart’s scorn ;—“now tenfold shame upon you ! How, sir, were I to proclaim your villainess, would you look in the eyes of her whom you—”

“Spare your threats,” said the unabashable

Frank ; “ were you to tell her that I adore you, and see in her only a deluded and fantastical old woman, were you, in short, to tell her the truth, she would neither listen nor believe—come, come ; this is by no means german to the matter. You cannot ask me to love Mrs. Wilkins ;—now, look at me—could you really find it in your heart to make such a request ? ”

“ Really, sir— ”

“ You would consider it impossible that I should ; and you are right ; no, Agnes,—this house has suddenly become to me a Hesperides—your odious guardian is but the dragon who watches the golden fruit—while you— ”

“ I can submit no longer to this intrusion, to this detention, sir,” said the orphan, vainly renewing her efforts to escape.

“ Insist ! submit ! ” cried Harcourt, lightly ; “ pretty words these, and full of meaning in some cases, but void of any in this : be wise as you are lovely, Agnes Davenel : I am ready to worship you—to obey your every wish—to hang upon your every look ; pause ere you reject my homage, ere you turn my love to hate—my devotion to revenge. You despise my menaces ? By Heaven ! you may live to repent your scorn. The world is a cold world, young lady—to such as you it is something worse ;—one word, one gesture from me may brand you with an infamy which tears nor protestations from your own lips can ever obliterate ! ”

“ Just Providence ! ” gasped Agnes, as she sank shivering upon a chair.

“ I would be your friend,” pursued Harcourt, heartlessly ; “ but my friendship is not so valueless as to be given where it is met by scorn ; it must be the growth of mutual kindness and confidence,—and I only ask of you, whether at this moment you

are not in need of my good offices:—think you when I become the husband of Mrs. Wilkins, and you stand beside her at the altar, her acknowledged relative and inmate, that those who know me best will pass you by without remark or inquiry? Or, should you despise the ribald jests of a score of libertines, how do you imagine that the tale which I could tell would operate among the graver members of society? The story of our meeting—and the willingness with which you accepted the companionship and protection of a perfect stranger—of, in short,” and he stooped and raised from the ground the drawing which in her agitation Agnes had suffered to fall from her hand, “the original of this portrait.”

Agnes uttered a faint shriek, as she struggled to repossess herself of her treasure: “If you are a gentleman,”—she commenced, but Harcourt had already deposited the drawing in his bosom, and the orphan again sank upon her seat, and burst into tears.

“I am sorry to deny you any thing, Miss Davenel,” said Frank, with affected seriousness; “but you have only yourself to blame—you have hitherto despised my power—yet I may still be conciliated. You see,” he continued, seating himself beside her, “that you cannot contend with me—come, now”—and, imboldened by her evident alarm and wretchedness, he threw his arm round her waist, while she sprang from him with all the energy of hate;—“this perversity will avail you nothing—you are in my power:—do not compel me by your scorn to make you *feel* it!”

Never had Agnes looked more beautiful than she did at the moment when Harcourt, in the mean triumph of his selfish nature, looked up to mark the effect of his words: her large eyes flashed, her

cheeks were flushed with indignation, and her lip quivered with a contempt which even amid her terror she sought not to disguise. In his last effort at impertinence, Harcourt had quitted his original station; and after one withering look, Agnes profited by the circumstance, and rushed from the room.¶

“D——n!” muttered Frank, between his clenched teeth, as the carriage of Mrs. Wilkins stopped at the door; and in five minutes more, he was smiling a false welcome, affirming that he had spent a solitary and tedious hour awaiting her return, and fooling to the top of her bent the too credulous benefactress who had sacrificed even common sense to his good looks and heartless flatteries, and who was about to trust to his honour and honesty the happiness of her few remaining years. Amid his smiles and sighs, Frank drew a mental contrast between the bright creature who had just fled from him with abhorrence, and the worn and withered woman who was now regarding him with looks of tenderness. And this then was the reward of all his anxieties, of all his exertions—it was a humiliating reflection; but as he had wrought, so he knew that he must bear—and he did bear it; for with bitter satisfaction he remembered that his victim was yet within his reach; and that ere long—but his reflections were hateful, and we will not pursue them.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"AND so Nichols is really off, and alone," said Lovell; "well, Mowbrey, I'll bet you fifty to one that—"

"Pshaw! I know what you are going to say; but take my advice, and close the clasp of your pocket-book, for this man-of-the-moon, this Harcourt, about whom no one knows any thing, save that he has a plentiful stock of good looks and impudence, will not be so easily caught; eh, Lancaster?"

"Can't say, 'pon honour."

"Why, if the worst came to the worst—"

"A very gallant commencement, truly!" laughed Lovell; "considering of whom we are talking—and, really, with all due deference to your acknowledged good taste on such points, I must be permitted to remark that I do not consider this adventurer so *very* handsome—the man is well enough, certainly; but Stultz and Hoby have no inconsiderable share in making him what he is; as to the lady—"

"Not a word about her, 'an you love me, Hal;" murmured Lord Lancaster; "I hate all retrospection, and my liaison with Lady Clara always reminds me that at the same period I lost a front tooth—I detest recurring to personal misfortunes."

"I can tell you a sufficiently singular fact," said Neville, "which is no less than that Harcourt, the day before yesterday, received a very polite note from the Countess of Blacksley, intimating that

Lady Clara Nichols begged to decline for the present the honour of his visits."

"Well done, Lady Clara!" shouted Lovell.

"My *dear* fellow," murmured Lord Lancaster, in a tone of suffering; "do pray, for my sake, be a little more piano; your vocal explosions are really quite terrific."

"What can be the meaning of so extraordinary a prohibition?" asked Neville.

"'Tis said that 'conscience doth make cowards of us all,'" replied Lovell; "how it may be in this case, of course, I cannot pretend to decide—there are rumours too,—thanks to the lack of caution which made poor old gossiping Lady Blacksley a party in the arrangement,—that Joseph Nichols has proved rather more insubordinate than his patrician bride anticipated; and that however the inclination for expense may remain, the means are most fearfully curtailed."

"Lovell, you are yourself the very prince of gossips!" yawned Lord Lancaster: "what nerve you have! what an exertion of energy and animal strength this perpetual causerie must demand—you really merit to have been a Frenchman—poor Lady Clara Nick—eh? what's the name of the individual?"

"Nichols," emphasized Mowbrey.

"Vile cognomen!" drawled his lordship, suddenly becoming unusually voluble; "she should have had better taste—the thing is actually atrocious—roturier to the last degree—it never struck me before—but his uncle was a blacksmith, I believe."

"A goldsmith," said Lovell.

"Ha! yes! a goldsmith—well, blacksmith or goldsmith, it is all the same—only a slight difference of colour:—What an odious name is Smith." The noble lord had evidently talked himself into a

mental confusion, and immediately became as taciturn as usual.

"What are the fellow's politics?" asked Mowbrey.

"Tory, of course," sneered Lovell; "heard you ever of a parvenu who was a whig? hyper-tory—an out-and-outer, I would wager my bay to a bass-viol;—you forget also that 'my father-in-law the earl' was to be conciliated in all ways, and he is, as in duty bound, tory-bred."

"Have they 'cut' altogether?" inquired Neville.

"Can't say: but if Lady Blacksley be allowed to interfere, the arrangement will be final, I have no doubt; for I understand she now affects horror at the work of her own hands. She has lately taken as much pains to separate the fond couple as she originally did to bring them together."

"There is nothing on earth which I hate like an old woman," said Lovell; "a compound of memory and mischief; living on the vanities of the first, which cloud her mind like a November fog in London; and on the excitement of the last, by which she eludes the stagnation of gray hairs and the palsy. Women should always be either young or invisible; for although wine may improve by time, it is no friend to a pretty face; and I hold it as a very proper arrangement that a man should be entitled to a divorce on the appearance of his wife's first gray hair."

And in the frivolous discussion which grew out of Lovell's ridiculous position, Lady Clara and her blighted hopes, Nichols and his desolated hearth, were forgotten: the disappointed husband, whose visions of a proud and happy home had faded away like the mists of morning; and the selfish and inconsiderate wife, whose narrow policy had drawn down the glittering fabric in ruins upon herself and

him. Light jests, inferential sneers, and offensive speculations were alike busy for awhile, and the names of Nichols and Lady Clara were familiar to every lip "as household words;" but, after a time, another tuft of thistle-down floated by on the breath of public comment, and superseded that which had so deeply engrossed the attention of the idle and the curious.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MEANWHILE, cheered by the countenance and assistance of Mr. Brockendon, animated by the hope of achieving a competence which would enable him to claim his promised bride, and happy in the consciousness of his own mental resources, Mortimer Eustace trod unweariedly the path of industry and perseverance. Already did he feel the blessedness of comparative independence; and, as he thought on Agnes, looked forward with cheerful hope to the time when, with her smile to animate his exertions, he should yet win for himself a brighter fame and a more certain dependence. But to this period of suspense he was not fated: a friend, a father, now watched over his fortunes, with all the intensity of a sudden and overwhelming affection; and with all a parent's anxiety (for Mr. Brockendon, from the moment in which he learned the relationship of Eustace to her who had been the idol of his youth and the dream of his later years, had considered him as a son), he forbore to check the salutary exertions of his adopted child; but when, in the overflowing gratitude of his heart, Eustace

confided to his friend the story of his affection ; when he painted the beauty of Agnes, her modest grace, her gentle piety, the uncomplaining sweetness with which she had borne poverty and privation, the resolute propriety which had induced their parting, and the desolate solitude of her young spirit : when he drew from his bosom the one only letter which she had ever addressed to him, and placed it in the hands of Mr. Brockendon, then indeed was the caution of the old man overcome—the last worldly feeling which had retained possession of his heart melted beneath the meek, unselfish sorrow of the orphan, and Eustace saw a tear start to the eye of his miscalled cynical companion.

“ Mortimer,” exclaimed he, dashing off the moisture as if jealous that it should be remarked, “ marry her—the poor child is unhappy ; she makes no complaint, and I like her the better for it, but still, I say, she is unhappy : she loves you, boy, you are blessed, too blessed ; none know so well the value of affection as those who have experienced its want ; there is a home and a heart open to receive you and your pretty bride—a blighted heart, perhaps, and an humble home ; but such as they are—”

“ Merciful Providence ! how have I deserved this ?” said Eustace, with deep emotion, as he seized the hand of his benefactor, and pressed it to his lips and to his heart.

“ I will tell you, boy ; by awakening the torpid energies and affections of age ; by teaching an unbeliever that there are yet honour and principle left among his fellow-men, and above all—Eustace,” he continued, with effort, “ by being about to become a husband ; to have your heart’s fondest visions realized, and by my means ; you can overpay me all,—give me that miniature of your mother—

it will but be a loan; in a few years, perhaps months—”

“My dear, my best friend!” cried Eustace; “to you I cannot refuse even this,—take it, and with it—”

“Enough, enough,” interposed Mr. Brockendon, as he hurriedly concealed the portrait in his bosom, “we will talk of your future plans; I shall joy to see a bright smile, and to hear a light step in my peaceful home—and we will be as one family, Eustace; your own intellect and your wife’s beauty will be alike subject of pride to the old man, to whom you will in your turn be as children; and you will bear with his weakness in consideration of his love: come, come, my son, wear a brighter brow, or I shall suspect that you are inclined to negative my proposition.”

“And it is even so, best, kindest of friends,” said Eustace, with affectionate and grateful determination; “never, never will your generous, your unmerited benevolence be absent from my memory: but, sir, I am a young man; Providence has bestowed on me health, and strength, and mental capabilities, which, properly exerted, will enable me to work my way through the world, and to maintain my independence; I cannot live upon even your charity.”

“Spoken like her son!” exclaimed Mr. Brockendon, triumphantly; “nor shall you need to do so, my brave boy. You are already beyond the charity of the whole world; I have settled upon you an income, which, moderate as it is, will yet free you from all pecuniary obligation. While I considered that you had but yourself to support I forbore to tell you this, for I rejoiced to see you breast the difficulties of the world, and force a footing for yourself; but now when I know and feel that the happi-

ness of another is involved ; another, whose youth and beauty only serve to increase her helplessness, I bid you claim that which has become your own ; release the cold-hearted relative of your Agnes from the inconvenience of her charge, and bring the loved one of your heart to the bosom of an old man who will cherish her for your sake, until he has learned to love her for her own."

It were idle to detail the reply of Eustace ; he was, indeed, scarcely able to articulate one ; his heart overflowed with happiness, and deep emotion is never wordy. He gazed upon his companion as on some good angel who had shed a sudden light upon his path, and spread around him a perpetual spring.

How glad, how glorious were his feelings ; how divested of every taint of worldliness and care ; like the summer sky upon which no cloud has yet gathered, like the flower on which no sun has yet set, like the eye of childhood, as yet unconscious of a tear,—like all that is bright and blessed were the emotions of Eustace. Fearful and wonderful is our nature !—the sport of circumstance, the puppet of an ever-varying fortune ;—now elevated by some lucky chance even to the skies, now prostrated by some evil influence alike in spirit and in hope, we are the creatures of destiny, wafted hither and thither like the thistle-down ; and undulating beneath the breath of fortune like the impalpable web of the gossamer. Vain and visionary are our hopes, idle and unprofitable our pursuits, poor and paltry our ambition : we hope, we pursue, and we aspire ; we win, we overtake, and we achieve ; and having done this, having excited the envy of our equals, the anger of our superiors, and felt that on all which we have accomplished the indifference of the world has cast its chill, we look back wondering and re-

pinning, marvelling that to achieve so little we should have risked so much ; and discontented, that having wrought unweariedly throughout a life of turmoil and restlessness, we should not have made a prouder progress ; and finally, having wept and sorrowed over the bitter fact, we bequeath our hopes, our fears, and our ambition to those who succeed us. And this is life ! That life to which we cling, and whose elongation we are prompt to purchase by sacrifices, by concessions, and even by crime ! That mysterious and incomprehensible existence to which, even amid its miseries, we are so wedded, that although shorn, not only of its splendour, but even of its commonest attributes of comfort, we still adhere, as to something valued beyond all else ! That life for whose preservation the coward yields himself up to scorn, the miser to poverty, the proud man to insignificance ; that life which, crippled as it may be by sickness, depressed by sorrow, and withered by treachery, we yet love beyond all earthly possessions ! We look to life as to a boon, when suffering threatens to abridge its term ; our very selfishness holds to it throughout every change of fortune ; and yet how lavish are we of its best blessings, of its finest enjoyments, when they are bright and beautiful about us ! In the first rush of youth, in the matured strength of manhood, in the haunts of pleasure and of passion, we peril it lightly ; but when it really becomes comparatively valueless, when darkness descends upon the spirit, and weakness withers the frame, then do we set upon its duration a price at which reason revolts ; when the palsied limb and the enfeebled intellect tell too plainly the ruin of the goodly fabric, then it is that we weigh every hour of existence in a scale which we are ready to turn with the hoarded gain of a youth of toil ! But perhaps it is better so ; for,

arrogant and heartless, we too often attribute to our own powers the strength which we are bound to refer to a Higher Cause ; and blindly glorify ourselves on that which is but lent to us for a time, to be withdrawn when a mightier One than ourselves shall so see fit—and assuredly no one weakness of our human nature more completely prostrates its vanity than this wild, uncalculating clinging to a life whose limitation it is beyond our finite powers to rule. How wise are they who, enjoying every blessing as it is vouchsafed, learn betimes to bend to a will more mighty than their own ; who, schooled in adversity, affix a true value to the gaud and glitter of the world ; and after a youth of sobriety, pass an old age of reason. Such was Mr. Brockendon ; though poverty, life's sorest, because most humiliating evil, had never laid its withering hand upon him, he had been bereft in heart—he had expended all its sympathies, its hopes, and its ambition, and like the desert which has been swept by the simoom, he had beheld a waste ;—the world had indeed smiled upon him, but there had been no peace within—he had shown the gilded casket to the crowd, and they were ignorant that the gem was not still shrouded there. He had learned to mistrust that world, but not to hate it—to look on life as a temporary trust, not as a permanent possession ; and to make of the allurements of existence, enjoyments, but not idols. With Eustace, even schooled as he had been in sorrow and bereavement, all was yet bright and sunny ; the future was an untasted paradise, the present a probationary struggle, the past a record of blended griefs and joys so massed and mingled by memory that it called forth as many smiles as sighs, and in its retrospect almost amounted to enjoyment.

How blessed a thing is hope ! It has been called

a cheat ; but even if it be so, who would not still be cheated to his happiness ? As fitly might we veil from our sight the sunshiny noon because we know that the gloom of midnight must succeed its splendour ; or refuse our admiration to the roses of spring from the knowledge that they will fade beneath the blight of a more chilly season. Bright-eyed, beaming hope ! the playmate of childhood, the companion of youth, the cheerer of age—the one counteracting influence by which we overcome a host of evils—the direct boon of Providence. What were man without hope ? Reason is the attribute which renders him superior to the brute creation—Hope is that which makes him more blessed ! It is the rainbow, linking heaven and earth—and brightly and vividly were its colours now blended in the breast of Eustace. He was no longer an isolated wanderer ; no longer a mere cipher in the sum total of humanity—he had an aim, a hope, a motive near and dear for the exertion of every energy ; and the rush of joy was almost pain (so nearly are our mortal feelings allied the one to the other) with which he contemplated the bright and beaming future. And well might he be pardoned, for fair, indeed, was that promised future—love, and friendship, and affluence were all combined in its delicious anticipation—all to which he had looked forward as the reward of weary years of toil was within his grasp ;—a home, and that home the dwelling of the only friend who had stretched towards him a helping-hand amid his struggles and his privations—a bride, and that bride the only one whom he ever loved :—his brain whirled ; his senses became confused—he felt as the dreamer feels when suddenly awakened from a fearful vision ; doubtful still of the truth of his safety, and of his identity. But the kindly voice which aroused him from his

revery, the kindly eye which looked upon his emotion, soon wrought their soothing influence; and after a time he was enabled to talk calmly and collectedly with his benefactor—to shadow forth his plans and purposes, and to create within his breast a present heaven from the mere visions of future enjoyment.

“And now,” said Mr. Brockendon, at length, “I will leave you; write without delay to Agnes: tell her that you are no longer orphans, and that a home of love awaits her—tell her—but surely happiness has unhinged my intellect,” pursued the old gentleman, with a smile, “or I should not prompt a lover about to address his mistress!”

CHAPTER XXV.

THE idlers were correct: Lady Clara Nichols had indeed declined the visits of Harcourt, and she had resolutely deprived herself of a companionship from which she had derived gratification, because she was conscious that the feeling grew by what it fed on. Educated, like herself, for the present hour, aristocratic in his habits, and fastidious in his tastes, the young barrister was precisely the description of person calculated to attract the notice and to excite the admiration of a volatile and by no means strong-minded woman. But although imprudent, Lady Clara was not guilty—hers had been the errors of vanity, not passion—and when she declared, without reserve, that Harcourt was *pétillant de graces*, she felt that she had nothing further to advance in his favour. He was a creditable companion—he

was a presentable acquaintance—he was a delightful dangler—she forgot that he was also an adventurer, a coxcomb, and a roué. And this is too generally the case in the world—a costly frame excuses a bad picture—and Frank was decidedly *for* the world; he had not a secret quality, not a mental attribute which would win for him the consideration of a solitary individual: but what care the crowd for qualifications from which they can themselves derive neither gratification nor advantage? If the clock-case be gorgeous, what signifies it to the man who takes no heed of time, that the works are wanting? To Harcourt, this figure was strikingly applicable—his was a costly case, but defective in its machinery; yet his *savoir faire* saved him with society: his talent was nugatory, but his tact rivalled that of a woman: heartless and hollow, he had the power of appearing all sentiment and sincerity; unprincipled and selfish, the words honour and liberality were for ever upon his lips. Reader, are you so fortunate as not to number a Harcourt among your acquaintance?

The individual to whom, in her worldliness of spirit, Lady Clara had united herself, was the perfect antipodes of the young barrister: uncompromisingly upright, just, and sincere, he was a good man, but he was a bad tactician; warm-hearted and affectionate, he wanted grace to make even his best qualities *tell* with the more self-centred; and while many sneered at his solecisms in politeness, few, if any, gave him credit for his better attributes. You heard a “thrice-piled” fopling drawl out that “real-ly that Mis-ter Ni-chols was a ve-ry respec-table man; but, ’pon ho-nour, he was so ex-treme-ly gauche and ro-tu-ri-er,”—and that was all, for even to the unwilling acknowledgment of his worth there was always a neutralizing drawback; while his worth-

less associate, Frank Harcourt, who was steeped in debt to the very lips, whose leading principle was deceit, and whose idol was self, was admitted to be a "fine fellow," and an "honourable fellow," and a "dashing fellow." But how worse than vain it is to moralize on the inconsistencies of a surface-judging world!

Unfortunately both for herself and her husband, it was even thus that Lady Clara Nichols reasoned; she had been educated in a bad school, and had worshipped at a false shrine: she preferred fashion to principle, and a high carriage to a high character; and consequently, while she was morbidly alive to every minute dereliction from fine breeding of which Nichols might be guilty, she was altogether incompetent to the appreciation of his many noble qualities. What could be anticipated from such a union, save precisely that which had occurred? A civilly inferred disgust on both sides, coupled with contempt on the one, and with disappointment on the other. For such feelings there is no alleviating principle like absence; but absence need not necessarily entail absolute "separation:" there is a quiet, concise, exclusive manner of making such an arrangement, infinitely less galling to the feelings of the lady and to the pride of the gentleman—Lady Clara had suggested, and Mr. Nichols had submitted; and thus, from a false feeling on her side, of weak and womanly resolution not to accommodate her tastes to those of the man whom she had married; and from a mild and mistaken one on his, not to compel his aristocratic helpmate to any measure to which she was averse; even this had been accomplished a separation, which the gentleman, however passive he had been in the original arrangement, had vowed, that were it once brought to bear, should be eternal. When, therefore, Lady Clara Nichols, on the de-

parture of her husband for one of his estates, withdrew to the mansion of her aunt, although she would not even to herself admit the fact, it was as a widowed bride. Her only disappointment on taking this step was produced by the information of Lord Somerville, that Mr. Nichols, viewing the determination of his wife as equally causeless and unreasonable, had positively refused to allow her more than a thousand per annum during her period of voluntary divorce.

A thousand per annum ! the countess, almost in tears, declared it to be equivalent to genteel pauperism ; Lady Clara, transported somewhat out of herself, denounced it as the income of a first-rate soubrette ; and the earl, with the causticity so peculiar to him, and so disagreeable to his daughter, maintained that it ought to be affluence to a woman who had not previously been mistress of a sous. Hateful reminiscence ! Lady Clara had already proved that all her memories of that period of aristocratic beggary had been long since worn out. Had she not for the last few months been as lavish in her expenditure as though she had been born expressly to become a great circulating medium ? And then her bills—how were they to be liquidated ? She thought of Maradin with a slight shudder—the odious Frenchwoman would absorb her first half-year's income—and some of her hats had been hideous ! She had positively been obliged to give them to Mademoiselle Imogène—then she glanced at Hamlet's—Heaven only knew what the unconscionable man would charge for setting her cameos, and for her brilliant bracelets, and for—it was horrid ! So did the lady rapidly run over in her mind sundry little pecuniary entanglements ; and when she closed the mental review at Howell's, she fairly fainted !

She had done Nichols injustice ; for he had generously considered, that despite her expressed contempt for money, it was yet possible that her expenditure had exceeded her means ; and with a generosity which even Lady Clara could not fail to feel, he had commissioned the earl to relieve his daughter from the whole of her embarrassments. But still, as Lady Clara declared with a pretty scorn, it was bad enough and shameful enough of Mr. Nichols to leave her with so wretched a provision. Be that as it may, the wife's written expostulation had as little effect on the obdurate husband as the more specious father-in-law's arguments had originally produced ; for the disabused citizen was at length quite convinced that he had paid a sufficiently high price for the honour and happiness of his aristocratic marriage.

Lady Clara is at present the belle ingenue of the countess's coterie ; changed in nothing, save that she has reverted to her original and economical modiste ; that she patronises muslins where she was wont to sport tissues ; and is more attached to écarté and vingt-un than at any former period of her life.

The bachelor-husband is doing wonders on his estate : he is planting, and building, and draining ; drawing plans for lodges, and bridges, and conservatories ; and reviving the good old English fashion of a full board and a free hall. Self-exiled from metropolitan follies, and from metropolitan exclusiveness, he originates where he used to copy, leads where he was wont to follow ; and surrounded by his friends, his horses, and his hounds, looks back upon the events of his London life as on a fit of the nightmare, which has left but one disagreeable result to remind him of its infliction—the annual payment of one thousand pounds !

Let no one hastily decide that this portion of our tale terminates abruptly ; it is but too true to nature ; and many are the marriages which have been even more warily contracted, but which have nevertheless produced precisely the same result. There is perhaps no one important action of life which is so lightly ventured as marriage. It is so much the fashion to talk of it jestingly, to speculate upon it idly, and to contemplate it carelessly, that few, in taking the leap, consider the depth of the precipice ; nor is this the worst evil : there is too frequently a species of intuitive and almost unconscious deception practised on either side ; and thus when the ceremony has actually taken place, the newly-married pair scarcely recognise the identity of their chosen partners ! The sun-kissed and waveless lake wakens into billows ; the blushing and beauteous rose lends its poison to the venom-seeking spider ; the angel becomes a mortal, and the slave a tyrant. In adopting this position, we naturally infer some species of sentiment on the one part and the other ; some portion of that transient hallucination which clouds for a time the finest intellect, and enables every one to live for a short while in a voluntary fool's paradise, which, after all, is at least worth no inconsiderable enjoyment of what is commonly regarded as worldly wisdom.

The case is even worse where the union is merely one of calculation and convenience ; where the most serious of all compacts is degraded into a mere system of barter ; and the feeling of propriety and self-respect made subservient to a spirit of ambition or sordid interest. Nor is the delusion under which the opposite sex too frequently labour with regard to the female character less deeply to be deplored ; they are so apt to draw false deductions from appearances, and to wrong in some cases as

much as they over-value in others. The high-spirited and right-minded woman seldom suffers the crowd to penetrate into her finer feelings : her heart is a closed volume upon which one eye only is permitted to rest ; while in every instance wherein that heart is concerned, she loses the elasticity of thought and the continuity of purpose which are so graceful in her sex. The coquette and the worldling are alike her victors in the social arena, for they sail smoothly along in the trade-wind of establishment-hunting, unimpeded by the thousand feelings of self-depreciation and self-distrust which are the invariable attributes of a delicate and well-regulated mind. Men, even the most clear-sighted and the wisest, are perpetually guilty of errors in judgment where females are concerned ; they mistake want of mind for modesty, tact for propriety of purpose, and worldly knowledge for sweetness of disposition ; while, on the other hand, they imagine art where it has no existence, and fancy that they detect a hidden purpose in the simplest actions. They are dazzled by the flashing of the laboured metal whose polish serves to conceal its alloy, while the unworked ore is overlooked or disregarded. They are attracted by downcast eyes, monosyllabic answers, and deferential glances ; and they seldom ask themselves if these be indeed the most promising attributes of companionship for the winter hearth.

Of the power of beauty it were idle to speak ; it was a wise ordinance of nature that we should love to look upon the bright and the beautiful ; and perhaps creation offers nothing more lovely than the fair face of woman. But—and here again how falsely are women estimated ! she who has courage to express opinions, and to give glimpses of powers, in the attainment of which she has passed many of the sunniest hours of her youth, and which have become the solace of her solitude, and the companions of her

privacy; through whose means she is rendered comparatively independent of the frivolities and dissipation of the world, and can find unceasing occupation in her own home:—how is she judged? Every word, every look is analyzed, distorted, commented on—her simplest sentiments are woven into meanings of which nine times out of ten she is perfectly innocent; and she moves amid the world's throng with a distinctly articulated identity which is never for a moment suffered to be overlooked or forgotten. And is not this unjust? Is not the exotic blossom, whose colours and fragrance have been drawn out by extraneous methods, whose culture has been carefully tended, and whose growth has been zealously watched, the first to wither under an east wind? And, in like manner, is not the mind which is awakened by thought, and study, and reflection to a just appreciation of the finer and more noble qualities of our nature, the most fitted also to honour and to cherish them when found? This is the first mistake.

The next affects the moral dignity of woman as well as her feelings; it is calculated not only to wither her youth, but to imbitter her existence. Men (we speak collectively, for the misconception is painfully general) appear to imagine that every married woman must necessarily become a toy or a tyrant! With weak-minded women such may indeed be the case, for even a simpleton must have a species of distinctive character: but not thence should it be inferred that a companionable female would ever condescend to degenerate into the one, or degrade her better reason, and falsify the feelings of her sex, by striving to become the other.

It has been said that women have no power over their married fate. Surely this is a delusion! Good sense and good temper cannot be utterly powerless

with any man : however anti-domestic his habits, or vitiated his tastes, the influence of a fond and feeling wife, like the dew of heaven, may be felt although unseen ; patience and forbearance, a bright brow and a welcoming smile, are the strongest links which can bind man to his fireside ; the struggle may be long—the process may be painful—but the reward is sure. “Woman’s love,” said one who knew well the truth of the apophthegm which he advanced, “is more than half gratitude. In like manner, the love of man is more than half generosity ; and they who give him the credit of a life-long rebellion against principle and good-feeling are nine times out of ten guilty of a libel upon human nature.

That a weak-minded or an ill-principled woman may fail to reclaim a truant husband is but too certain ; in the first case she lacks the power, and in the second the sincerity necessary to the task ; but that a fond, and patient, and well-judging wife, whose pride, and happiness, and hope all centre in the man for whose sake she has, comparatively speaking, resigned the world, should she resolutely determine to devote herself to that high and holy duty,—that she should fail seems almost beyond belief ; and surely no one would willingly become a convert to so dark a creed !

If the Almighty indeed “created man in his own image,” he cannot be all evil ; and if he be not all evil, he must be sensible of the value of the deep, absorbing, self-sacrificing love of woman ; of her perfect trust, her clinging tenderness, her life-long devotion. She may be too often the plaything of his youth, but let her at least be the friend of his manhood, the light of his fireside, the associate of his hours of retirement, the soother of his fatigues, the partner of his pleasures ; let her, in short, be that which, when he seeks to win her to his home, he

promises that she shall be ;—let him treat her, not only as the object of his love, but as a rational being ; let him bear with those weaknesses which are the characteristics of her sex, and cherish that gentleness which makes her very failings graceful ;—and Man, proud in his consciousness of strength, generous in his plenitude of power, and forbearing in his sense of authority, will make for himself a friend whom neither change of fortune, nor loss of health, nor even disgrace—bitter and blighting though it be, could ever shake ; a companion in sorrow, a nurse in sickness,—in short, and let him pause ere he scoff at that which he must possess ere he can justly appreciate it, he will win the deep, undying, devoted love of woman !

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE heart of Eustace quickened its pulsations as he reached the home of Agnes. He was about to look on her once more, and to detail to her the happy news at which, in his letter, he had only hinted. Who is insensible to the delight of becoming personally the harbinger of good tidings ? Surely a being so coldly constituted is to be pitied. Not even to his pen would Eustace depute the pleasant task of telling *all* his happiness ; and he had already pictured to himself the gentle smile and the glad tear of Agnes as she listened to the tale. His heart leaped joyously in his bosom, and the very sound of the brazen knocker, as it echoed beneath his hand, was music to his delighted ears !

When he reached the breakfast-room, he found

himself in the presence of Mrs. Wilkins, and he was instantly conscious that she held in her hand the identical letter which on the previous day he had addressed to Agnes.

"There must surely be some mistake, Mr. Smithson," commenced the widow, as the servant, after having announced Eustace, closed the door of the apartment; "I thought that I had requested a cessation of your visits."

"I am but too conscious of that fact, madam," was the reply; "but unforeseen and happy circumstances, which you could not possibly have contemplated when you issued that mandate, have in some degree compelled me to disregard it; a friend—"

"Yes, yes: I know to what you allude," interposed his auditor; "but surely you could not imagine that I should be so easily duped by a well-told tale of a generous friend, and a second father, and an offered home;—young man, young man, you have much to answer for; Miss Davenel tells me that you are a writer, and consequently I suppose that so clumsy an invention as this letter cost you very little trouble. I have often heard that authors mix up truth and falsehood so constantly, that they themselves scarcely know the one from the other—but I have lived too long to be so easily deceived; and as I have been weak enough to burthen myself with the young person who has called forth this discussion, I consider it my duty not to allow her to render herself a beggar for the second time."

"Madam," said Eustace, with modest firmness, "while a fear of poverty remained, I forbore to urge Miss Davenel to the risk of sharing in its miseries—I was too well tutored in the school of privation to wilfully subject one so dear to me to similar suffering; but now, when without being actually wealthy, I am unexpectedly possessed of a sufficiency to se-

cure her at least from want, I cannot but consider myself privileged to claim the performance of a promise made to me in the chamber of death, and subsequently repeated in the house of mourning."

"Pshaw!" broke in his auditor; "what are promises? and how can you expect me to give credence to so improbable a story? I have not lived until my present age to be cheated by such a tale; men do not now-a-days give away a couple of hundreds a year quite so readily. Such incidents may do very well in a novel, where the hero bestows a purse upon every village ostler who holds his stirrup, and never becomes the poorer for his pains; but, in real life, young man—"

"Such examples of disinterested generosity are rare, I admit, madam; and I am consequently only the more grateful that I have met with such a friend."

"Well, well, Mr. Smithson," said the lady, impatiently, "all this is very fine and romantic, I dare say; but I cannot at present suffer Miss Davenel to leave my house; there are circumstances now in progress which render her residence here alike desirable and necessary to me."

Eustace looked as though he required further explanation. Agnes had hitherto been an object of such undisguised indifference to her relative, that this sudden assumption of interest in her movements was as incomprehensible as it was unwelcome to her lover.

"I consider my situation with regard to Miss Davenel as one of extreme responsibility," resumed the widow; "I am her last relative—her sole surviving connexion—some time hence I may be induced to think seriously of your proposal; and a friend shall then investigate the truth of your story, —a competent friend, who will moreover have an

interest in the welfare of Miss Davenel of which you cannot be aware."

"Whoever he may be, madam," said Eustace, warmly, "I shall ever feel grateful to him for a kindly feeling towards Agnes, and shall gladly meet his scrutiny—but can you not, and will you not, madam, at least fix some definite period for the termination of my suspense?"

The widow simpered and looked down: and had she been forty years younger, Eustace might possibly have rightly interpreted the pause which ensued; as it was, however, he gazed in wonder, and only marvelled what so extraordinary a manner could be intended to infer.

"It is possible—barely possible, sir, that a week or two may suffice—at all events, leave your address; and should I find it expedient I will cause the inquiry to be made."

"Can I not be indulged with an interview with Miss Davenel, madam?"

"Miss Davenel is indisposed, sir."

"Indisposed, said you? Agnes indisposed?" exclaimed Eustace.

"At least indisposed to admit of any intrusion," was the cold rejoinder; "I do not perceive to what advantage a love-sick conversation could tend; and you may see by the letter which I hold in my hand that I am equally averse to expose her to the reception of a billet-doux; which, however well it may be worded, is by no means calculated to calm her mind, or to improve her understanding."

"Has not Miss Davenel received that letter? did you not, madam, read it at her own request?"

"I answer 'No' to both questions, young gentleman; but I, who am her natural guardian, have done both without seeking or requiring any permission so to do; and if I have been fortunate enough to make

myself understood in our present interview, have also answered it. I permit no description of folly under my roof."

"This at least I did not anticipate," said Eustace, indignantly. "Unhappy, persecuted Agnes!"

"What say you, sir?" demanded Mrs. Wilkins, angrily; "beware in time—there is a conspiracy against me, and Miss Davenel shall answer for it!"

"I am silenced, madam; nay, I am penitent,—visit not upon Agnes the penalty of my intemperance,—I will wait patiently, uncomplainingly, until you summon me to your presence, when every question which you may ask shall be answered, and every inquiry satisfied."

"You are wise in time, young man," said the widow, somewhat conciliated by his changed manner: "but all this must be entered into elsewhere,—I will submit to no further intrusion;—and, mark me—do not delude yourself with the belief that Agnes Davenel will enrich you through my means—I will not give her a penny, sir,—not a penny;—my property shall never become the prey of an adventurer. I am more keen-sighted than you suspect, nor am I to be so readily duped;—I tell you distinctly, that not a pound of my money will ever be wasted in encouraging a foolish and romantic marriage."

"I seek not any thing from *you*, madam, save the hand of Miss Davenel," replied Eustace, composedly; "grant me but that, and I shall be the happiest of men."

"I will send my friend to you shortly, Mr. Smithson," said his imperturbable companion; "and as I chance at the present moment to be particularly engaged, perhaps you will oblige me by terminating your visit."

Fearful of arousing her readily awakened ire,

Eustace obeyed; and with a heavy heart did he quit the inhospitable dwelling of the widow. A cloud had fallen upon his spirit. The happiness which but an hour back he had fondly imagined to be already attained, was now uncertain: and as he entered his solitary home, cheerless and desolate appeared every accustomed object;—in vain did he attempt to frame some system of conduct; his thoughts were bewildered, and his perceptions blunted, the reaction of feeling had been so violent; he could not study—he could not occupy himself with his literary duties—in short, for the first time, amid all his trials, Eustace was wretched.

Far different was the widow's state of mind on the termination of the interview; delighted at her own talent in diplomacy, she was, on the disappearance of her visiter, unusually self-gratulatory and amiable. Nothing makes us so pleasant as a good opinion of ourselves; it is a feeling which the world cannot damp—we mistake its "dread laugh" for applause, and are more tolerant of the failings of others when we suspect ourselves to be superior to their weakness.

In this happy mood, Mrs. Wilkins rang the bell, and desired a servant to summon Miss Davenel. "No, no," she murmured beneath her breath, as she transferred the letter of Eustace to her pocket, "had she received these two pages of nonsense, or had she been allowed an interview with their writer (some low fellow, I am certain), her thoughts would have been full of her own affairs, and she would not have paid proper attention to mine.—Well, Agnes," she continued, as the orphan entered the room, "now I have given you time to recover from your surprise at the intelligence of my marriage, I have sent for you to ask your advice on a variety of points, on all of which poor Parsons

is totally inadequate to form an opinion. Why, bless me, child ! one would think I had told you of a death instead of a marriage—you look the very picture of misery.”

“My looks scarcely belie me, madam,” was the reply; “I have spent the interval which you were considerate enough to allow me for reflection, in an endeavour to ascertain what was my duty under these distressing circumstances.”

“Distressing circumstances, Miss Davenel !”

“Suffer me to proceed,” said the orphan, earnestly. “I have implored that I might be directed to a proper decision, and I trust that my prayer has been heard ; madam,” and in the intensity of her emotion Agnes threw herself on her knees beside the chair of her relative, “as you value your happiness, your respectability, do not marry this man !”

Mrs. Wilkins gasped for breath—she could not articulate a syllable.

“When your house became my home, and obedience to your will my duty,” pursued Agnes ; “when you rescued me from poverty and privation, I resolved to be to you, should you permit it, as a child ; until to-day no means have been afforded to me of doing so ; and now—with the probable prospect of your enduring displeasure—with the even more bitter possibility of my own disgrace should my simple declaration be disbelieved, or distorted by the falsehood of a villain, I am ready to fulfil my voluntary self-compact—oh, madam, I entreat of you, for my sake, for your own, do not marry this man !”

“Are you mad ?” exclaimed Mrs. Wilkins, at length. “Disgraceful woman ! have you fallen in love with Mr. Harcourt ?”

“Do you ask if I love Mr. Harcourt ?” cried

Agnes, springing from her knees, and looking haughtily down upon her companion ; " welcome beggary, suffering, and death, rather than the love of such a libertine. Yes, madam, I dare to repeat the word—I have applied it to this man before to-day, and when I had even less cause—yet bear with me, and ere you banish me from your house—ere you brand me with your displeasure, let me at least do my duty, and tell you all."

" Pray go on, pray go on, Miss Davenel," said Mrs. Wilkins, with the forced smile of subdued agitation ; " you have begun so well that I shall allow you to proceed, were it only to indulge you in so becoming an exhibition of temper."

" I thank you, madam, for the concession, let it arise from whatever motive," replied the orphan, making a violent effort at composure ; " to tell my tale explicitly, I am necessitated to revert to that period of poverty when my beloved and enfeebled grandmother was almost wholly dependent upon my humble exertions for support. Then, madam, I was compelled, however reluctantly, to venture alone into the streets of London to deliver my work to my employers ; yet I had ever trusted to the modesty of my demeanour, and the meanness of my dress, for protection against impertinence ; nor did I trust in vain, until the unhappy day when I encountered Mr. Harcourt : to him my helplessness was encouragement, my alarm amusement ; he made insulting comments—insulting proposals—in fine, madam," concluded Agnes, in a lower tone, as she buried her flushed face in her spread hands, " I was humbled to the dust, for I was compelled to accept the interference of a stranger to protect me from his impertinence."

" It is all true, my dear madam, perfectly true," said Harcourt, as he suddenly advanced into the

room and confronted the orphan; "I will not deny a tittle of the tale; let the fact that the lady was young, pretty, and alone plead my apology. You, my kind friend, are too much a woman of the world not to know that 'such things are.' From a feeling of compassion I had promised to Miss Davenel that I would guard her secret inviolate; but, since she has chosen to be thus far her own chronicler, she will perhaps permit me to terminate this 'most pleasant history.' The stranger, my dear madam, whose interference was so singularly well-timed and acceptable was young, and bold, and—in short," continued Frank, placing in the hand of Mrs. Wilkins the portrait of which he had so dishonourably possessed himself, "he was the original of this sketch—"

"The very man!" exclaimed the widow, with uplifted hands and eyes: "he has just left the house."

"Just left the house!" murmured Agnes, in an accent of misery.

"Just left the house!" exclaimed Harcourt, passionately; "insolent varlet! nay, then, in that case, the lady must have proved kinder than even *I* had thought!"

"Dastardly coward!" said the orphan; "now, at least, all delicacy towards you is at an end; I can even thank you for the insult: madam—"

"Heed her not, my good friend," cried Frank, as he moved towards the widow with more anxiety than a deliberate policy would have dictated, "she is transported by passion; and, indeed, after what has appeared, is unworthy to occupy your attention, or to harass your feelings."

But Mrs. Wilkins, easy dupe as he had hitherto found her, yet possessed a fund of curiosity which overwhelmed for the time her tardily-excited sensi-

bilities: it may be, also, that certain misgivings began to cross her mind; or (for the anomalies of the human character are beyond analysis) a feeling of pity for the desolate young creature before her, awakened in her bosom the womanly gentleness which never can be wholly extinguished while one good impulse remains: be it, however, as it may, the sudden excitement of the scene had its charms for one whose life had hitherto been as a stagnant pool, unchecked by event or emotion.

"I will at least hear, my dear Harcourt," she said, peremptorily; "how much of the tale I may heed is an after consideration;—proceed, Miss Davenel—"

"I have little more to tell, madam," resumed the orphan, as the rich blood once more mantled over brow and bosom; while, as she raised her eyes to the face of Harcourt, she smiled her contempt of the threat which his look conveyed; "yet I hold it as my duty to inform you that, unworthy as he is of the affection and confidence with which you have honoured him, he has dared to repeat his insults under your own roof; to tell me that while he gave his hand to you, he reserved his love for me!" Agnes ceased: blushing, and bowed by shame, she turned away: while Harcourt busied himself in endeavouring to persuade the widow that the tale was false: it had been difficult for an uninterested spectator to determine its effect on Mrs. Wilkins: she rose calmly and slowly from her chair, extended her hand to Harcourt, who pressed it to his lips, and then beckoning Agnes to follow her, silently quitted the apartment.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE emotions of Harcourt during the prolonged absence of the widow and her protégée were decidedly the reverse of enviable. A thousand times he cursed—not his want of principle, but his want of tact: he felt that he was indeed doubly foiled, alike in his ambition and in his love; if the term love be not in reality profaned by its application to such a feeling as that which he had entertained towards the orphan. And yet, there was still a hope; he glanced at his irresistible person, and became reassured: his bride-elect could not resolve to dismiss him for so venial a fault. Was it not the most simple thing in the world for a man to admire a fine girl?—Was it not equally a matter of course that he should tell her so?—And was not the individual who furnished him with the opportunity of so doing the legitimate object of blame? What could be expected by an old woman of sixty who placed herself in juxtaposition with a beauty of nineteen? Ergo, Mrs. Wilkins was the culprit, and Mr. Frank Harcourt as innocent as light.

Delicious sophistry!—how ingenious is human error in efforts at self-extenuation! Were mankind but half as prompt and persevering in seeking apologies for the lapses of their neighbour as for their own, what a world of love and good-fellowship should we live in; for assuredly we should all be faultless! What a ceaseless tide of conversation would be arrested when we had no longer the privilege of discussing our particular friends; what caustic wit, what piquant repartee, what admirable

humour would be lost to the world! But, en revanche, how would the sweet charities of life spring up around us like summer roses, shedding bloom and beauty over all the finest impulses of our nature. How freely would heart meet heart, unchilled by suspicion, uncankered by hypocrisy,—how—but I am writing of Utopia in London;—I am weakly striving with my woman-hand to link the antipodes;—and what is even worse, I have left Mr. Frank Harcourt to the unwelcome companionship of his own thoughts.

The widow at length returned; and in her case it might be truly said that one short hour had done the work of years: even Harcourt, cold and callous as he was to the sufferings of others, started as she entered the apartment; and for the first time in his life was fairly at fault for words.

“I am come, young man,” she commenced, in a tone as startling as her looks, “to tell you that, insulting and unprincipled as your conduct towards myself has been, I forgive you; and what is even more difficult, I forgive you also that, by your agency, I have been weak enough to attach ridicule to my gray hairs: but for the destitute orphan beneath my roof—for the poor girl who was bequeathed to my care by one who was on her death-bed, and to whom I have so grudgingly supplied her loss; for the insults which you have heaped upon her innocent head, I have no forgiveness; the last hour has changed my nature: for your sake, but yesterday, I would have resigned every comfort by which I am surrounded; to have benefited you I would have bereft myself;—now, for your sake, I could almost hate my kind—”

“My dear, dear friend!” commenced Frank, pleadingly.

“Not a word, sir,” was the stern reply: for the

spirit of the widow, unsubdued as it had been throughout a long life by sorrow or constraint, now gave a temporary energy to her purpose, which rendered her for a time unconscious of the pang at her heart: "I have come to take a final leave of you; to destroy in your presence every vestige of an infatuation at which I have learned to blush, ere it is yet too late to overthrow the last vision of your narrow-minded and unfeeling policy;—this is my will—I made it, not at your suggestion—no, no,—you were too wily, too subtle, to remind me that your years of thralldom would be but few; but because—in short, sir, I had bequeathed to you all of which I had power to dispose,—and now—"

"Be not so rash, my dear, my best friend!" exclaimed Frank, seizing the hand which was about to deposite the precious document on the summit of a very fierce fire; "let me at least be heard ere you condemn me;—I have not deserved this from you; you are duped,—deceived—"

"Not now," said the widow, calmly; "that I have been both scarcely needed your admission; but now I am aware of my position;—release my hand, sir: if it be indeed my fate to make the fortune of a beggar, it shall at least be one of my own blood."

Frank did release her hand, for the epithet which she had applied to him rang in his ears, and almost maddened him—had it but been a man who thus dared!—He looked towards the pale and panting woman who had unconsciously suffered the parchment to fall from her hand upon the hearth-rug, and his passion passed away at once.

"And thus, then, we part," he said, with affected composure; "truly, the jest will be a pleasant one! And the tale of a light girl is to overthrow every promise, every prospect, every pledge—"

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"Harcourt," interposed the widow, solemnly, "can you in honour lay your hand upon your heart, and tell me that—that—in short, that you offered yourself to me, regardless of the affluence which through my means you would become possessed? that for my own sake you sought to become my husband? If you can indeed do this, then must the tale of Agnes be a false one, and the punishment shall fall where it is due."

"On my honour, say you?" exclaimed Frank, vehemently, as the renewed hope fluttered at his heart: "and did you, could you doubt it? Now then, indeed, the moment has arrived, when I am privileged to upbraid;—you have injured me, my friend,—deeply, stingingly." And the arch hypocrite indeed looked the lie even as he uttered it.

"This, at least, is balm to my wounded feelings," said the widow; but she said it somewhat more coldly than her auditor approved: "I will confess my weakness;—I had feared that it might be otherwise, and thus I shrank from confiding in you so fully and perfectly as I should have done; now, however, all cause of concealment is at an end; and to prove to you how completely I have faith in your assertion, based as it is upon your honour as a gentleman, and on your best feelings as a man, read that will, dear Harcourt, and you will see that I had done all which I had power to do, to recompense you for an affection so disinterested and unhopèd-for."

"My kind, my generous friend!" whispered Harcourt; "do not ask me to look on any thing which is associated with the thought of our eternal separation—the assurance of your affection, of your faith in me—"

"Nay, nay," persisted Mrs. Wilkins; "for my sake as well as for your own, I earnestly request of you to run your eye over that parchment."

Frank, with affected reluctance, obeyed: for a time his brow was smooth, and his parted lips appeared ready to wreath themselves into a smile; but suddenly he started, gnashed his teeth, and as the blood mounted to his hair-roots, flung the will upon the carpet, exclaiming, "What juggle is this, madam?" Did you take me for an idiot, that I should sell myself to gray hairs and wrinkles for the wages of a mechanic? Knew you so little of me as to think that I could be caged so cheaply? or of yourself as to indulge in the infatuated belief that you could indeed be an object of love to any man? But I thank you that you have suffered me to look over the edge of the precipice—for that privilege, at least, I am indebted to you—Marry you thus!" and the callous, selfish libertine laughed out his scorn, as he raised his dark eyes steadily to the face of the widow: "I would rather wear out my existence in a prison!"

What more he might have added in the paroxysm of his disappointment, it were impossible to determine; for as the words left his lips, his insulted and heart-wrung auditor fell senseless at his feet. Frank rang the bell violently, and then seizing his hat, hurriedly left the widow to the care of her servants, and quitted the house. It was no fainting fit which had prostrated the energies of the unhappy old lady; for the last two or three hours she had been in a frightful state of excitement—she had alternately suffered doubt and fear; had ventured to hope, and finally every good feeling of her nature had been cast back upon her: the struggle was too mighty for her years; and when the attendants laid her upon the nearest sofa, every eye detected the presence of paralysis. Fearful was the sight which awaited Agnes as she obeyed the hasty summons of

a servant ; her suffering relative was slowly recovering to a consciousness of her affliction, but the distorted features, the powerless limbs, all told a tale of fatal import. Assistance was promptly procured by the orders of the anxious orphan, who, amid her sorrow, yet preserved her usefulness ; while the terror-stricken Miss Parsons stood by, wringing her hands in all the helplessness of uncontrolled dismay ; and the loquacious and wondering servants were whispering their surmises and their suspicions ; and combining, according to their several judgments, causes and effects.

Powerful stimulants restored the sufferer for a while to the possession of her faculties, but she was fully conscious that her interval of mental strength would endure only a short time. She uttered no murmur ; she did not even advert to the cause of her sudden indisposition ; but summoning Agnes to her bedside, she talked long and earnestly with her ; bewailed her want of greater affection, and besought her pardon for the sternness of her unprovoked reproaches. Strangely does the approach of death soften the human heart ! Conscious of its own lack of pardon, the sinking soul readily forgives—looking inward upon its own transgressions, it is anxious to show mercy to those of others, —and aware for how short a period it can possess the affection of its fellows, it clings only the more closely to the love by which it is surrounded. When she dismissed the weeping girl, Mrs. Wilkins was closeted for a considerable time with the panic-stricken Mr. Marsden and a professional friend : the will, which Agnes had been careful to secure, she had already restored to her, and had subsequently, at her desire, destroyed. The mental exertion proved, however, too mighty for the exhausted

frame, and a second paroxysm of the malady terminated on the morrow the sufferings of the orphan's last relative.

Once more Agnes looked on death ; and death is ever awful, above all to the young. Once more she gazed upon the closed eye and the sealed lip ; but not as she had last felt when bending over the departed, did she now feel. Her heart sank not ; her spirit was not prostrated ; her affections had been unchallenged ; and though she looked with gratitude and kindness upon the friend whom she had lost, the more bitter pang of buried love was spared to her.

"Come to me,"—thus she wrote to Eustace :—
"fearlessly, confidingly, I say to you, come to me, and support me under this new trial—I am alone :—when I last dwelt in the house of death, your gentleness robbed it of half its gloom : now,—save in the instance of one who is still more wretched than myself,—a helpless, hopeless, spirit-broken woman, the companion of my late relative, no voice, no look replies to mine ; and I fear that I succeed but ill in the offices of consolation, while I have nothing beyond words to offer. Now it is, dear Eustace, that I feel in all its bitterness the impotence of poverty, for, alas ! I am powerless to assist. My only trust is in the last arrangements of the dead—surely the old and faithful companion of so many years cannot have been forgotten.—Eustace ! the warm blood has mounted to my brow, for I am about to speak of myself ;—I have received your letter—that letter so long delayed in its delivery—so kind, so generous, so comforting to your poor Agnes ; to tell you all the feelings to which it has given rise, even were it possible, would but profane them. Is not the hand of Providence apparent throughout all the events of my existence ?

—but for your noble, your disinterested affection, I tremble when I reflect on what must have been my fate. Now, however, a life of grateful devotion is before me—now, indeed, I shall awaken to a new existence—a gleam of light even at this moment breaks through the gloom by which I am surrounded: I think of your unfading affection, and I am happy.”

Splendid was the funeral cavalcade which attended the widow to her narrow home; there were plumes, and draperies, and hired mourners, and sable-coated friends, all anxious overmuch as to the degree of estimation in which they had been individually held by the “amiable departed;” and there were many spectators; for this, the most hollow and meaningless of all human customs—the vainest mockery of all mortal observances, never fails to attract the idle and the vulgar: every pageant is to them a pastime, however sad its tendency; and there is a morbid gratification in looking upon “the pomp and circumstance” with which the poor clay that is so soon to banquet the worms is conveyed to its last resting-place—there the plumes are cast away, the draperies thrown aside, the mourners dismissed;—the world, which has played its empty part, even to the grave, yields up its share in the dead—and the crowd disperse, comment, hurry each to his avocation or amusement, and forget!

One invited guest failed at the funeral feast,—and that one was Harcourt: he was no longer like the wind, an “unchartered libertine,” free to come and to go; in vain Mr. Marsden inquired at his lodgings; the landlady grew from sullen to impertinent,—in vain he sought him at the clubs which he had been accustomed to frequent—nowhere was he visible—his tailor, his bootmaker, and his job-master were alone able or willing to “prate of his where-

about ;" and, uncertain of their identity, to these individuals the worthy Marmaduke did not apply; though, as he very sagely remarked to Mr. Billington, "ingratitude was the most heinous of all crimes; and a want of policy the most fatal of all deficiencies—Mr. Harcourt, whatever might be his feeling, should at least have kept up appearances." The banker only groaned; for he remembered how expensive the intimacy of Frank had been to the widow; a fact to which his books bore ample testimony; and which, he had a shrewd idea, might in some degree militate against his own interest.

But if an expected guest were indeed absent, an unexpected one to the man of business supplied his place; for when the mourners returned from the grave-side to Baker-street, and proceeded to the library to be present at the reading of the will, they found a stranger associated with Miss Davenel and the spirit-bowed Miss Parsons: it was Eustace; who at once candidly and manfully explained his position, and the consequent reason of his appearance in the circle; the claim was instantly admitted, for it was generally believed that, as the nearest of kin, Agnes must inherit the bulk of the deceased's property: two individuals of the party were, however, better informed upon the subject; and the well-meaning but weak-minded Mr. Marsden, as he contemplated the meek placidity of the orphan, pitied her in his secret heart, as he attributed her look of gentle and patient endurance to the brilliant delusion under which he did not doubt that she was even then labouring; while the man of law, who was yet a bachelor, was gazing earnestly in the fair face opposite to him, and thinking how he might have been induced to commit his interests had he not known the truth.

"There is a Providence that shapes our ends,

rough-hew them how we may"—and never was the truth of the axiom more apparent than on this occasion. The will was a most perfect instrument ; for Mr. Latitat had himself an interest therein ; and, moreover, had never throughout life been guilty of a flaw. There were sundry legacies—to Marmaduke Marsden, Esq., for a mourning ring, five hundred pounds ; the same sum to Miss Parsons, to Mr. Billington, and to Mr. Latitat for his efficient professional exertions ; one thousand pounds to her beloved relative Agnes Davenel. Here the lawyer glanced towards the orphan, and was startled by the expression of deep and unequivocal gratitude which overspread her pale countenance ; while his other listeners started with surprise, and became all ear—a few words sufficed to render the astonishment still greater ; for the next sentence bequeathed all other personal and funded, as well as landed property, to Mortimer Eustace, the only son of Edward Eustace of ———, the beloved second cousin of the testatrix, and to his heirs for ever ! A faint exclamation of joy escaped the quivering lips of Agnes, as her lover started to his feet : and great was the wonder of the party when they became convinced of the identity of the wealthy heir of Mrs. Wilkins, with the despised and insulted Mr. Smithson, of whom they had severally heard from the indignant widow. Congratulations and questionings poured in upon him, to which he replied with effort ; for his heart was full of Agnes, his beloved Agnes, who would now share with him a home of affluence, and of the friend without whom it would seem shorn of a portion of its happiness.

Poor Miss Parsons ! how Eustace blessed her, when thoroughly exhausted by the revulsion of feeling which the assurance of her own continued comfort had occasioned, and relieved by the departure

of the guests from all necessity for further exertion, she fell fast asleep in an easy-chair beside the fire, and left him free to commune with Agnes on his extraordinary and startling change of fortune. All upon which he now looked was his own—of the very house from which he had so lately been dismissed, he was the master; and where he had striven in vain to obtain a hearing but a few days back, his nod had suddenly become a law.

"Is it not wonderful, my own Agnes?" he asked; "looks it not like the effect of magic? I seem as though I must be moving in a dream. And this then was the proud relative who spurned my father's poverty, and treated his every necessity as a crime. Strange! most strange! What a lesson will this be to us, Agnes, of the futility, the emptiness of human vanity: what puppets are we in the hands of Providence! When we blindly imagine that we are following the dictates of our own free and unfettered will, we are in truth but working out the ends of a Mightier Power than ourselves, and teaching a great moral lesson to the world. And now—"

"And now, dear Eustace," interposed Agnes, with a fond smile, "Miss Parsons is awaking from her sleep, and will be glad to seek a more commodious resting-place; therefore, despite the excellence of your arguments, and the extent of your new authority in this house, you must e'en submit to a second dismissal, and depart."

"Farewell, then, for to-night," murmured Eustace; "to-morrow, Agnes—what do I not hope for to-morrow?—a long, long day beside you, with my good friend near us, full of happy thoughts and bright fancies. Did I not tell you that the world owed us many years of enjoyment? and are they not now before us?—the debt will be paid—farewell, then,

Agnes—think of me ere you sleep, that I may be in your dreams, and—good-night.”

“And is this really all true, Miss Davenel?” asked her companion, aroused by the closing of the door, and involuntarily giving utterance to her waking thought; “how very strange, to be sure! And am I actually to live in your house? how happy I shall be!”

“I sincerely trust that you will be as happy as you deserve,” smiled the orphan; “your attachment to your departed friend has entitled you to the protection of her successors, and rely on it that it will never fail you.”

“Heaven reward you!” said the guileless Miss Parsons; “I am sure that I will do all that lies in my power to prove my gratitude. What a charming young man is that Mr. —, the gentleman with the two names, I mean! so much handsomer and more amiable than Mr. Harcourt! How happy you will be! And so fine-looking a couple! Dear, if poor Mrs. Wilkins could look up from her grave, how surprised she would be to find that Mr. Smithson was not Mr. Smithson; but that he was really Mr. Eustace —. Very extraordinary, to be sure, and all so unexpected! What should I have done had you not been so kind as to offer a home to my gray hairs; I might have tried to do something for myself with poor, dear Mrs. Wilkins’s legacy, you will say; but you may believe how very impossible it is, Miss Davenel, to commence life anew at sixty.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

How prone are we, each and all, to murmur at our respective destiny, and to believe that we have been singled out by misfortune from the world's throng! How apt are we to hold the miseries of others lightly, and to exaggerate the measure of our own! How wilfully do we shut our eyes to the brightening of our fortunes, and keep our gaze fixed upon the retreating clouds which have passed over us! Nor do we remember to acknowledge how vastly the sum of our suffering has been augmented by our own agency; by our own imprudence, or supineness, or want of fortitude. We are content to murmur, and to condemn, and to despair; and the best energies of our nature become stagnant, from a want of that mental exertion without which we cannot hope to secure our footing in the paths of a world, where the resolute and the sturdy are ever ready to thrust aside the timid and the infirm of purpose. However weak our conduct may have been, however defective our calculations, or faulty our principles, we invariably revenge ourselves on fate, by ascribing to our unlucky stars every evil which may overtake us in our career.

Thus did Harcourt console himself, if consolation it could be called, when the gates of a prison closed behind him, and he saw that the evil which he had long dreaded had at length overtaken him. On reviewing the events of the past year, he cast all the onus of his ill fate upon the innocent Agnes, the unsuspicious Eustace, and the deluded Mrs. Wilkins; his own narrow-minded and heartless policy, his own

uncompromising and hateful selfishness, were overlooked in the retrospect; and he only pictured to himself how differently his speculation might have terminated, had the excellence of his arrangements been unfettered by these counteracting influences. Frank, however, was not of a despairing temperament; and while the society of the Bench offered such choice and desirable associates as Captain —, my Lord T—, and Sir E—, all good men and true, who had fretted their hour on the turf and at the gaming-table, there was no risk of stagnation: and after all, liberty is merely ideal—a chimera, in pursuit of which mankind exhaust alike their fortunes and their lives, and which few, if any, ever secure. And accordingly Mr. Frank Harcourt renewed his acquaintance with a score of “capital fellows,” who had been “dashing men about town,” and was soon deep in the mysteries of hazard, rouge et noir, and roulette. He was still possessed of a few loose pounds; and it is a merciful ordinance of custom that the incarcerated debtor shall not be cut off at once from the means of indulgence in those menus plaisirs which have been the cause of his incarceration; but that, be his debts as weighty as they may, and his creditors as needy as they please, he is still at liberty to dispose as he sees fit of the wreck of his broken fortunes.

Harcourt was by no means a person likely to neglect such a privilege; and he had a trifling knowledge of some rather intricate principles of gaming, which gave him distant glimpses of renewed independence. Hope, degraded into a decoy, beckoned him onward under the disguise of a leading card, or a winning die; nor was he slow to obey her bidding. But Hope, perverted from her original and more worthy purpose, loses her blessedness, and wiles only to betray; and even thus did

she delude the infatuated Harcourt: worldly-wise as he was, there were competitors in the race of cunning domesticated in his present locality, to whom he was by no means equal either in guile or in experience, crafty as he believed himself to be. This truth was soon most unpleasantly forced upon him; and the bitter conviction came with it, that his I O U would here be nothing better than waste paper. His thoughts reverted to Lady Clara; surely with the feelings which she had evinced towards him, she could never calmly contemplate the utter subversion of all his bright visions, the overthrow of his anticipated fortunes; the struggle was nevertheless a bitter one with which he compelled himself to the humiliating prostration of his palmy pride; and the exposure of his grovelling and mundane necessities—he might have spared himself the pang; for Lady Clara, instantly recognising the well-known character, like a wise and prudent woman, who had bought her wisdom and her prudence at too high a price to lightly peril either, returned the letter unopened, with a cool announcement, formally inscribed in the envelope, that her ladyship declined all further correspondence with Mr. Harcourt, to whom she accordingly begged leave to restore the letter which he had been polite enough to address to her.

This was the last straw floating on the surface of his fortunes; for he had taken immediate steps to ascertain whether “his widow” had exhibited any relenting towards him since their late interview, which he discovered had also been their final one. Had Frank contemplated his position without self-disguise or self-bias, he would at once have felt himself to be a moral murderer; but he was too essentially selfish for such mental speculations, and his necessities were so multitudinous and so multi-

farious, and his means of gratifying those necessities so utterly exhausted, that he had not a thought to waste upon mere theoretical miseries. But it were idle to trace to its close the career of a ruined gamester and a baffled libertine ; to follow through all its sinuosities the expiring and impotent effort of a world-worn and worthless nature, and to add another item to the already crowded catalogue of crime. Suffice it that Harcourt still exists ; still moves among the unfortunate and the abandoned ; and, true to his vocation, still strives to dupe, when the occasion offers, some less experienced spirit than his own ; or becomes in turn the prey of superior cunning ; still does he look down with contempt on the humbly honest, and the obscurely honourable ; and glorify himself upon those passages in his early history, which have clouded his latter years with disgrace and disappointment. A type of faded fashion, of perverted powers, and of the folly which would erect a superstructure of happiness ere it had laid a foundation of principle, the self-deceived and self-ruined Harcourt is, even amid the dissolute and the thoughtless, pointed at as an example of empty pretension and idle self-appreciation—a man of words and sophistries—a creature combined of cunning, casuistry, and caution ; suspicious of his fellow-men, and almost of himself—a degenerated dandy—a spirit-bowed and spirit-weakened victim to his own heartlessness, and want of straight-forward honesty of speech and purpose.

How beautiful is truth ! how plain, how peaceful are her paths ! lighting up the human character as the sunbeam illumines the heavens, and shedding around her the germinating principle of virtue ! *Splendide mendax* might have been the motto of Harcourt, as it was the brief chronicle of his career.

He had commenced existence as a living lie ; and the result of years of miserable chicanery and deception had been precisely such as might have been anticipated.

It is a relief to turn to the contemplation of virtue and happiness ; and to revert to the small but grateful circle, which, on the morning subsequent to the widow's interment, met in the drawing-room in Baker-street. The surprise of Mr. Brockendon, when he learned from the lips of Eustace the unlooked-for change in his fortunes, may be imagined. That one, apparently so friendless, so utterly dependent upon his own exertions for support, should suddenly find himself possessed of affluence, was so startling a fact, that it was not until the wary old gentleman had listened to all the details of the affair, and made himself master of every circumstance connected with the bequest, that he could be convinced it had not originated in some mistake which might yet prove fatal to the hopes of his young friend.

How hard does it appear to the young and the sanguine when they are called upon to combat the caution of the more mature and suspicious ; how difficult do they find it to fold the wings of their enthusiasm, and to forego the wild flights of their obstacle-spurning imagination. Eustace wondered at the pertinacity with which the old gentleman pursued his inquiries, but he satisfied them with respectful and ready forbearance ; and only ventured at intervals to remind him that he had not yet been introduced to Agnes, and that she was anxiously expecting them.

"Ay ! ay !" said Mr. Brockendon, "natural enough—and you are as anxious not to disappoint her. Poor child ! her troubles are over, I trust ; at least she will never suffer again from unkindness.

Have a care, Eustace, the world is now bright before you, and its temptations are many; sudden revulsions of fortune sometimes turn the wisest heads; and in truth you might almost be excused should you for a while be tempted to overlook your own identity; but remember, my son, that the happiness of this young and gentle girl is hinged upon your own; and that you are responsible for it in the eyes of Providence. You have indeed found gold in the mine, and water in the rock—neither dive nor drink too deeply, lest you exhaust both the one and the other; and now,” continued the old gentleman, as he resumed his hat and gloves, “now for the meeting with my adopted daughter.”

Happy, if not joyous, was that meeting; predisposed to value and to admire the gentle orphan, Mr. Brockendon folded her to his heart, and breathed out a fervent blessing alike on her and on Eustace; prepared to respect and to cherish the benefactor of her affianced husband, Agnes, blushing with blended timidity and gratification, shrank not from the warmth of his salutation; and for a moment the delighted old man forgot her beauty in the affectionate respect with which she greeted him; but after a time he seated himself beside her, and listened to her low sweet voice, and looked into her loving eyes, and wondered no longer that Providence had visited so fair a being with unlooked-for blessings. Her pure and pensive beauty,—the calm contemplative character of her young brow, over which care had swept, but on which it had forborne to leave more than its faintest trace—the meek, confiding happiness of her smile—all combined to attract the eye of Mr. Brockendon, and to appeal thence to his heart. He wondered no longer at the deep and steady attachment of Eustace; for he felt that no earthly benefit could have

compensated the forfeiture of such an affection as shone in those dark eyes, and awoke to music from those parted lips ! Reminiscences of his early youth—of his own blighted hopes and withered prospects, passed over the spirit of the old man, as he sat with the hand of the fair girl within his own ; memories over whose sunniest spots there still hovered a gloom which years had failed to remove—upon whose records there rested a shadow which time could not sweep away.

Thus is it ever with poor human nature ; its happiest moods are dimmed by a regretful tear, its fairest promises carry a blight even amid their bloom. Like a wounded bird, when it strives to soar in air, its weakened wing fails in part to perform its office, and the flutter of conscious infirmity arrests the vigour of its flight.

The only spirit which did not either wander into the future or fall back upon the past, was that of Miss Parsons. To her the present was all in all ; she had the snuggest seat at the fireside ; the most comfortable corner on the sofa ; if she spoke, she was not only listened to, but answered ; if she left the room, she was never taught to feel on her return that she had entered at an unwelcome moment. She was permitted to have feelings, and preferences, and opinions ; and this fact alone, to one who had, during the lapse of seventeen weary years, been compelled to degenerate into a piece of human machinery, was of itself no inconsiderable privilege. The weakness of her head was overlooked in the goodness of her heart ; and in short, as Miss Parsons herself expressed it, " It was very pleasant after being nobody all one's life, to become somebody in one's old age."

And Miss Parsons was right : there is an elasticity in the human character which causes it to re-

bound when the yoke of tyranny and oppression is removed, though never so tardily ; and a smothered fire in the recesses of the human heart, which, however carefully it may have been smothered for years, will yet flash forth when it is left free to shed its genial influence on those who have awoke it into existence. There is no mistake more fatal than that which supposes any being, however low in the scale of intellect, or however bowed by adventitious circumstances, to be incapable of kindly impulses and pure affections. Hath not the otherwise inhospitable desert its ground-spring ? the weary waste of blank and barren sand its smiling oasis ? And is it not even thus with the human heart ? The sparkling waters may gush forth as freely in more beautiful and bowery places ; the majestic forest-trees may stretch their welcoming branches over fairer and grassier spots ; but neither the one nor the other becomes more valuable from its improved locality : and in like manner, although the gentler impulses of our nature may appear more attractive when combined with those higher and nobler attributes with which they seem formed to be associated, they are not the less estimable of themselves when they emanate from a more limited intellect or a less prepossessing exterior.

This truth was demonstrated in the case of Miss Parsons ; her ready good-nature, and her never-failing good intentions, were serviceable as well as pleasurable to Agnes, whose peculiar position entailed an unusually constant necessity for their exertion. The extreme youth, the constitutional timidity, and the pre-occupied mind of the orphan, rendered the superintendence and good offices of the more prescient and pains-taking old lady highly valuable ; for, be our imagination as exalted, and our aspirations as lofty as they may, the world and

its thousand details yet put forward a claim which we should in vain affect to disregard; and which prove too plainly that the *aut Cesar aut nullus* system is utterly inconsistent with the exacting routine of an everyday existence.

Thus did worthy Miss Parsons work out for herself, by the very strength of her singleness of heart and simplicity of purpose, an importance in the eyes of the less world-accustomed Agnes, which gradually restored her to a sense of self-respect and self-appreciation; and thus did she rivet the last link of the new and welcome bond between them.

To Eustace, meanwhile, the dawning of each succeeding day offered only a renewal of happiness; with that respectful regard for the feelings and comfort of Agnes which rendered him so dear in her eyes, and so estimable in those of others, he exiled himself from her presence save when he was accompanied by his adopted father; and it was in his humble lodging, where we first introduced him to the reader, friendless, and almost penniless, that he awaited, uncomplainingly at least, if not patiently, the termination of the brief period of mourning, at whose cessation he was to claim the hand of Agnes. But how different were now the musings of his solitude! how gay and golden the visions in which he indulged without a fear of disappointment; and how light the labours which he had not yet relinquished; and when at length the day so long anticipated indeed arrived, with how grateful, how happy, and how sincere a heart did he utter those vows by which he bound himself to cherish throughout existence her whom he had so long loved; and receive from the hands of his first friend the wife of his young affections. The worthy Mr. Brocken-don wept as he stood beside them at the altar; but

the tears which he shed were happy ones, warm from the heart ; while poor Miss Parsons sobbed aloud, as it seemed, through sympathy, for there was a smile upon her lips which negatived all suspicion of sorrow. Of Agnes it is almost needless to speak. She shed no tear ; she did not even breathe a sigh ; and if there was a slight gravity on her young brow, and an unwonted pallor on her cheek, yet her voice was firm as she plighted her faith, although it was so low that Eustace bent his ear to catch the words as she uttered them. But when she was once more beneath the roof of her destined home, and that she knelt before the kind old man by the side of her new-made husband, while with convulsive energy he blessed them as the aged only can bless, then indeed the tears burst forth, and she wept out her happiness on the bosom of her enraptured bridegroom ; who, as he folded her to his heart, forgot his sudden affluence, his worldly wealth, and remembered only that the day-dream of his existence was at length realized ; that his probationary period of doubt and sorrow was overpast, and that he was indeed the husband of the fair and gentle Agnes !

THE END.

HARPER'S FAMILY LIBRARY.

DESIGNED FOR ADULT PERSONS.

"Books that you may carry to the fire, and hold readily in your hand, are the most useful after all. A man will often look at them, and be tempted to go on, when he would have been frightened at books of a larger size, and of a more erudite appearance."—Dr. JOHNSON.

THE proprietors of the Family Library feel themselves stimulated to increased exertions by the distinguished favour with which it has already been received.

The volumes now before the public may be confidently appealed to as proofs of zeal on the part of the publishers to present to their readers a series of productions, which, as they are connected, not with the general, but with permanent subjects, may, years hence as well as now, be consulted for lively amusement as well as solid instruction.

To render this Library still more worthy of patronage, the proprietors propose incorporating in it such works of interest and value as may appear in the various Libraries and Miscellanies now preparing in Europe, particularly "Constable's Miscellany," the "Edinburgh Cabinet" Library, &c. All these productions, as they emanate from the press, will be submitted to literary gentlemen for inspection; and none will be reprinted but such as shall be found calculated to sustain the exalted character which this Library has already acquired.

Several well-known authors have been engaged to prepare for it original works of an American character, on History, Biography, Travels, &c. &c.

Every distinct subject will in general be comprehended in one volume, or at most in three volumes, which may form either a portion of the series or a complete work by itself; and each volume will be embellished with appropriate engravings.

The entire series will be the production of authors of eminence, who have acquired celebrity by their literary labours, and whose names, as they appear in succession, will afford the surest guarantee to the public for the satisfactory manner in which the subjects will be treated.

Such is the plan by which it is intended to form an *American Family Library*, comprising all that is valuable in those branches of knowledge which most happily unite entertainment with instruction. The utmost care will be taken, not only to exclude whatever can have an injurious influence on the mind, but to embrace every thing calculated to strengthen the best and most salutary impressions.

With these arrangements and facilities, the publishers flatter themselves that they shall be able to present to their fellow-citizens a work of unparalleled merit and cheapness, embracing subjects adapted to all classes of readers, and forming a body of literature deserving the praise of having instructed many, and amused all; and above every other species of eulogy, of being fit to be introduced, without reserve or exception, by the father of a family to the domestic circle. Meanwhile, the very low price at which it is charged renders more extensive patronage necessary for its support and prosecution. The *immediate* encouragement, therefore, of those who approve its plan and execution is respectfully solicited. The work may be obtained in complete sets, or in separate numbers, from the principal booksellers throughout the United States.

Recommendations of the Family Library.

THE following opinions, selected from highly respectable Journals, will enable those who are unacquainted with the Family Library to form an estimate of its merits. Numerous other notices, equally favourable, and from sources equally respectable, might be presented if deemed necessary.

"The Family Library.—A very excellent, and always entertaining Miscellany."—*Edinburgh Review*, No. 103.

"The Family Library.—We think this series of books entitled to the extensive patronage they have received from the public. The subjects selected are, generally, both useful and interesting in themselves, and are treated in a popular and agreeable manner: the style is clear, easy, and flowing, adapted to the taste of general readers, for whom the books are designed. The writers are mostly men of high rank in the literary world, and appear to possess the happy talent of blending instruction with amusement. . . . We hesitate not to commend it to the public as a valuable series of works, and worthy a place in every gentleman's library."—*Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge*.

"We take the opportunity again to recommend this valuable series of volumes to the public patronage. We know of no mode in which so much entertaining matter may be procured, at so cheap a rate, as in the Family Library."—*N. Y. Daily Advertiser*.

"The Family Library should be in the hands of every person. Thus far it has treated of subjects interesting to all, condensed in a perspicuous and agreeable style. . . . We have so repeatedly spoken of the merits of the design of this work, and of the able manner in which it is edited, that on this occasion we will only repeat our conviction, that it is worthy a place in every library in the country, and will prove one of the most useful as it is one of the most interesting publications which has ever issued from the American press."—*N. Y. Courier & Enquirer*.

"It is needless at this late period to commend to public attention and encouragement the collection of delightful works now in a course of publication under the appropriate title of the Family Library."—*N. Y. Evening Journal*.

"We have repeatedly expressed our unwavering confidence in the merits of this valuable series of popular and instructive books. The Family Library has now reached its sixteenth number, with the increasing favour of the enlightened American public; and we have heard of but one dissenting voice among the periodical and newspaper publishers who have frequently noticed and applauded the plan and the execution of the Family Library. A censure so entirely destitute of reason cannot injure a class of publications pure in sentiment and judicious and tasteful in composition."—*The Cabinet of Religion, &c.*

"The names of the writers employed are a sufficient surety that the merit of the Family Library will suffer no decline."—*N. Y. Evening Post*.

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